Yarma and Kayla.

Part One.

Chapter One.

His real name was Jeremiah Eliezer Holzman. But the square at Krochmalna Street had no patience for long names. That's why they called him Jarme, with the nickname "Kutz." This nickname stuck to him because that's what they called in Warsaw the spiky balls that young people would throw at people on Tisha B'Av. When such a ball got into a man's beard or a girl's tangle of hair, it wasn't easy to get it out. Jarme enjoyed pricking and stabbing his good friends, as well as the females he had affairs with. His wife's name was Kayla-Leah Kupermincz and everyone called her Kayla the Red, because her hair was as red as fire.

By the time he was thirty-two, the prickly Yarma had already been to Pawełk four times for theft. He was a master at picking locks. He had also been arrested several times for trafficking in women - "live goods" in the words of pimps. Red Kayla had changed three brothels in her twenty-nine years of life: one on Krochmalna Street, one in Smość, and another in Tamkis. Blind Ice, none other than him, was her first pimp. Yarma met Kayla in a tavern on Krochmalna Street number 6. After spending a day and a night with her, he took her to a teacher-teacher on Stavski Street 3 and married her. This judge did not ask many questions, and did not examine the fringes of those who came to him to get married or get divorced. Unlike the other rabbis, he would take his three rubles and immediately pull out a ketubah, or give instructions to write a get.

It was 1911, about six years after the first Russian revolution. The strikers and bomb throwers had their way, and Tsar Nicholas II drafted a new constitution. But the First Duma collapsed, and a Second and Third Duma were elected. In Russia, the Black Century incited the masses and called for pogroms against Jews, and the nationalists in Poland demanded the boycott of Jewish goods. Hundreds of thousands of young men and women fled the border and moved to Prussia or Galicia. From there they went overseas to seek their fortune in America. The Yiddish newspapers wrote every week that the Balkan Peninsula was a powder keg. The political articles foresaw the outbreak of a major war: not only Turkey against Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro, but even between Russia and Germany. Dr. Herzl died, but the Zionist movements held a congress that year, as in previous years. The socialists distributed leaflets that said that Zionism was an empty delusion, and that Jewish workers should fight for socialism in their own countries and not dream of a distant land; after all, this was a desert inhabited by Arabs, and Sultan Abdul Hamid would never give them a charter. 6 But in the brothels and taverns on Kruchmalena Street, they did not read newspapers or engage in politics. Everyone there, on the other hand, remembered the socialists' attack on the underworld: the rebels then broke into the brothels, beat prostitutes, tore off

bed linen, gouged out eyes, and broke ribs. Everyone remembered that some of the attackers were sent to Siberia, and that a few Reds were even hanged in the prison in the fortress. Many were killed that bloody Wednesday. But all that was a long time ago.

In fact, Yarma the Thorn could read a Yiddish newspaper. He was one of Piasek's thieves, 7 and for a while he even studied at a yeshiva in Lublin. When a thief from the gang needed to write a letter to his parents, or to Buenos Aires, 8 he would come to Yarma to have him write for him. Yarma wrote the letter in Yiddish, and the address on the envelope in Russian. Every morning he would buy a newspaper, but he would only read the serialized novel: "The Bloody Woman," "The Hidden Lady," and other such novels. He would usually read the printed passage to Kayla. Sometimes he would read it himself, and then tell her what happened in the story. Kayla's green eyes sparkled when she heard what the author had to say about De Malvo, and she claimed:

"Oh, writers have such strange minds. They can glue everything together, even one wall to the wall opposite."

"It's all fabrications. A bunch of eggs," Yerma agreed with her. "They sit there, these idlers, with pens in their hands, making noise as if there was a fair in the sky. They know how to bluff, but they can't do anything. Not even tie a cat's tail."

"It all comes from studying Torah," Kayla argued. "They study Gemara and sharpen their intellect."

"Yes, that's right. Hezekiah Spiegelglass knew the fine print. When one of our people came to him for advice, Hezekiah would rub his forehead like a rabbi, think, and answer to the point. He made fun of all the clumsy Russians in Poland. He had an unusual talent. Once he carried the police chief's gold watch himself.

“Did you catch him?” Kayla was startled.

"No. He returned the watch of his own accord and said to the commander, in Russian: 'Here is your watch.' The commander-in-chief almost had a stroke."

The husband and wife loved to talk. Not just sleep together. They would lie awake almost all night in their apartment at number eight Krokhmalna Street, lying there talking. Red Kayla had endless stories. A million stories. And Yarma had ten stories for every story Kayla told.

Kayla never left Warsaw. She hadn't crossed the city's checkpoint since they brought her from the provinces twenty years ago. The furthest she had gone was Prague, or Przemysl. 9 But Yarma was a constant traveler. There were times when he used to travel on trains and play all kinds of gambling and card games with the passengers. He knew how to arrange these fools... Once he was in the city of Mława, near the border, and smuggled those who were going to America across the border. He also smuggled goods into Prussia without duty, and from there he transported them to Russia. It wasn't long before they sent him with a load of females to Buenos Aires. Yarma was involved with all the gangs of prostitutes and cashiers in Poland. He had a calendar on which were written the dates and addresses of all the fairs throughout Russia. Kayla would come back and declare:

"Yarmela, I am the happiest woman in the whole world. I ask God for only one thing: that my happiness never ends. I always put money in a charity box and ask God for you to be healthy."

"Kayla, I wouldn't trade you for anyone, even if they gave me your body weight in gold!" Yarma assured her.

"There hasn't been a love like ours since the world began," Kayla whispered.

They trusted each other, and talked about everything openly. The husband and wife agreed that if Yerma lusted after a woman, or if Kayla lusted after a man, they would not have to hold back, and could do whatever their hearts desired. But on one condition: not to keep a secret, but to tell the truth immediately after the fact.

They kept their word. During the two and a half years they had been together, the rascal had only picked up a few females on the side, when he had the chance to travel out of town. Last week, Kayla did it for the first time, when she gave herself to Blind Icha. Icha was lying injured in the hospital, after a stolen goods dealer stabbed him. Blind Icha had protection, and thanks to her he was given a separate room in the hospital. Kayla came to visit him sick with a cheesecake, and Icha asked her - in the name of the good old days - to let him do what he needed to with her. And so, all bandaged up and riddled with fever, he laid her in bed. The whole thing didn't last more than a minute, while on the other side of the door the

compassionate nurse stood chatting with the doctor on duty.

At night, when Kayla told Yarma what had happened, he covered her with kisses and declared:

"Kaylishi, you have done a mitzvah. Congratulations!"

"I cried all day afterward," Kayla said.

"Did you cry? Why? You're not an innocent child anymore, and I'm not some kind of innocent saint either."

"Oh, Yarmela, I wanted to be only yours. But he caught me, and before I knew what and who, it was already after all the commotion. I spat in his face."

"You shouldn't have done that. Blind Iche could easily be your father."

"You're not angry, are you?"

"vice versa."

Yarma demanded that Kayla tell him every detail, every crumb. He questioned and asked again and again. He became strangely excited and entered a state of wild intoxication. In fact, Kayla acted exactly like that when Yarma confessed to her about an adventure he had had with a certain cook in Kalisz, and with a certain carpenter's wife in Lodz. That night Yarma began to say that blind Icha was getting old, that he was no longer what he used to be. He went on to say that it would be appropriate to invite Icha to live with them for a few days, or even a few weeks, after he left the sanctuary. 10 Why not? Let him rest a little until he came to himself. Yarma said:

"Don't forget, Kaelshi, that he was your first."

"Yarmal, I forgot everyone. I came to you as a virgin."

"A virgin with receipts. If you don't be a silly girl, you will be a guest in the sukkah and enjoy every good thing."

On Saturday, after the cholent, Yarma and the red Kayla went to the hospital to visit the blind Icha. Yarma bought the patient a bonbonniere, a box of caviar, and as an addition - a bouquet of flowers. From all the windows and balconies they watched the couple passing by on the street with the gifts. Kayla was of medium height and high-breasted. She had a narrow waist and a round bottom. In truth, she had a flat bottom like a boy's. But she padded it with pillows. Her legs were shapely: narrow at the ankles and thick near the calves. Her red curls shone in the sunlight and twisted like tongues of fire. Yarma was much taller than her. His body was narrow like a young boy's. He had large, black eyes, slightly slanted. His cheeks were sunken, and above them was a nose that sometimes looked straight and sometimes curved like a bird's beak. His chin was pointed, with a deep groove in the middle. The husband and wife walked with light dance steps. Yarma wore a new suit, a floral tie, and a pearl brooch for decoration. He wore brown shoes, and a stiff hat, round as a melon. Kayla adorned herself with a yellow dress with pleats and ribbons, and yellow shoes with thin, high heels and golden buckles. She wore a necklace with a pendant around her neck, and earrings with round pearls dangled from her earlobes. Thin bracelets jingled on both her hands. Everyone knew where the couple were going: to visit blind Icha, who was Kayla's first, and later transferred her to the coarse Jaime. In those days, Icha began to have an affair with the fat Rachel, and she agreed to live with him on the condition that he send Kayla to another area.

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Blind Icha's room in the hospital was full of well-wishers when Irma and Kayla came to visit. People brought Icha all sorts of good things, despite the prohibition against feeding the sick with foods that were difficult to digest. They brought chopped onions fried in goose fat, cholent, kugel, stuffed fish, stuffed intestines, spleen. They also brought him wine, liqueur, Yisrael. An "aunt" from one of the brothels brought the patient a huge bouquet of roses. The whole gang was there: Shmuel Shamenet, the long-dried Leibush, Motka Esh Lehaba, Shaye the kidnapper, and the fat Rachel. Rachel now lived with a cart driver, a trucking yard owner, fifteen years younger than her. Even deaf police officers from the Seventh Ward came to visit. Icha was a good friend of many police officers and maintained good relations with everyone.

The police were looking for Barla Kiszke - the dealer in stolen property, who had stabbed Icha in the neck. It was a miracle that Icha got out of the whole affair alive. In fact, everyone was looking for Barla Kiszke: not only the police, but also the good friends of the blind Icha. They were looking for him all over Warsaw, and he was already considered a lost man. His sentence was pronounced, because it was decided to stab him when they caught him.

Blind Icha lay in bed, his neck wrapped in a thick bandage. He was blind, and a large scar ran diagonally across his left cheek. Icha was a huge man, who could strangle an ox with his two large, rough hands. His thick tangle of hair was grayish, like black pepper mixed with salt. He covered his gouged-out eye with a black aspen, and his open eye sent dark glances in all directions, full of the firmness of a leader. He knew his position. What value would Krochmalna Street, the street square, and the tavern at number six have without Icha? There was nothing he did not have a hand in. Blind Icha was involved in everything. True, he belonged to the old generation. Now a new generation of thieves, pickpockets, bribe-takers, thugs, and rascals had grown up who were willing to risk their freedom and murder for a few pennies. But the older generation was still strong enough, and had the power to block the little ones from getting too close to the plate. A rumor spread on the street that the blind Aiche even had a gun, and that he hid his fire-breathing weapon under the pillow or under the mattress of the hospital bed. He had many friends, but also quite a few haters. Aiche did not spare money for times of need, despite the many businesses he had run over the years. He was generous, and helped everyone generously. He even donated to orphanages, schools, and Talmud Torah institutions. When one of his good friends was caught and went to Had-Gadya, Aiche sent him packages and supported his wife.

Yarma and Kayla appeared at the door, and all the friends greeted them with a loud cheer. Blind Icha raised his hand in a gesture of greeting. At one time he had given up the red Kayla for the fat Rachel, and later regretted it. When Kayla married Yarma the Thorn, Icha sent her fifty rubles as a wedding present. It was a big event. It was rare for a woman who had been in three brothels to get married. And not just for no reason, but to a learned, half-intelligent fellow like Yarma the Thorn. The Warsaw prostitutes saw this as a sign that one should never lose hope, that there was still love in the world, even when one was stuck up to one's neck in mud. It had happened that an occasional client had fallen in love with a dissolute girl and lived with her. But these two very quickly broke away from Krochmalna Street, went to America or South Africa, and nothing more was heard of them. But Yarma the Thorn and the red Kayla remained to live on Krochmalna Street. Every day they would come to the tavern to play dominoes, cards, and have a chat. Yerma didn't change. He didn't become a good son, but stayed in business and continued to make a living from dubious businesses. Everyone had complete trust in him and Kayla.

Blind Icha feared that Yarma would become his enemy after he did to Kayla what he did when she came to visit him in the hospital. At the time, he demanded that Kayla keep the matter quiet. Icha even worried that Kayla would no longer tolerate him and would speak ill of him, because a strong man like

him should not show weakness and take care of a friend's wife. Therefore, when blind Icha saw this couple with the gifts, a stone was lifted from his heart. He smelled the flowers they had brought him and asked Kayla to open the bonbonniere so that he could choose a chocolate candy. In this way, he wanted to show them how important the visit was to him and how much he enjoyed their company. Icha motioned for the couple to sit by his bed, and people hurried and pulled up chairs for them.

In recent months, the members of the tavern had gathered to plan something that even to them seemed like a wild delusion. It was one of the plans they called "flowering towers in the air." Yarma the thorn said that in America there was a gang that called itself "The Black Hand." It intended to be part of the mafia that was founded in Italy many years ago, and had now moved to wealthy America. The members of the Black Hand were not ordinary thieves. They used to send letters to millionaires, with the demand: "Send us such and such an amount. If you don't, you will receive a fire dumpling right on the head. Signed: The Black Hand." Sometimes the gang members kidnapped a rich man, demanding a fortune to release him. If they didn't pay the ransom, they simply laid him down and his tracks disappeared. No trace was ever found - neither of him, nor of his bones. Yarma read about it in Warsaw, in a Yiddish newspaper that copied the list from a New York newspaper.

Yarma thought about all this, and also about other ideas he had read about in the newspaper. For example, digging a tunnel that would reach the basement of a bank, penetrating it and emptying the safe. Blind Icha was more practical. He claimed that from the beginning it was a dream of a headless man. Warsaw is not New York, nor Chicago. Here, as soon as you start digging a tunnel, the clumsy Russians will find out. Besides, the young guys in Warsaw are chatty and chatty. These brats will boast and brag to their wives. As you know, women have long hair and long tongues and cannot keep a secret. A third project was also proposed: to take over a train carrying a mail car and rob the cash. This was not some idea born in America. Something like this had already happened in Poland, in the days when the socialists belonged to an organization called "For the Good of the People." They robbed a sack full of gold coins. And why can't it be done again? A train must stop if you put an iron bar on the tracks. If you stop it at night, in the middle of the forest, the police won't find out so quickly. There are only two or three guards on the mail car. Two or three guards are no problem. They can be easily eliminated. And if you don't want to shed blood, you can tie them up and gag them with rags. Blind Icha rejected this idea too. He claimed that it was inappropriate for those times. The socialists belonged to a large movement that wanted to remove the Tsar from the throne. To this end, they used rich good men, military officers, and even generals. Besides, many of them were caught and executed. The brats from Krochmalena Street and Smocha Street don't have enough ammunition, and they can't make bombs. So where will they hide the bags of coins? And how will they divide the loot? Blind Iche had spent enough time in prison. Now, in his old age, he had no desire to be sent to a concentration camp or to swing from a gallows rope. He had blown all the plans out of the water. The protection money he collected from brothels and shopkeepers who paid him to keep their businesses from burning down, or to keep them from spilling filth on their flour sacks, on their boxes of goods, or on the decorative items they sold, was

enough for him.

These were usually the topics of conversation in the street square or in the tavern. Now, in the hospital, these topics came up again. They talked about the need to do something that would shake Warsaw and bring in a lot of loot. Blind Icha had canceled everything in vain here. This was just talk. Hezkalj Spiegelglass was already dead. Since the riots of 1905, Warsaw had been filled with military men, deaf policemen, and just plain informers. Every doorman had to report any nonsense. When three shoemakers met to drink a jug of beer, the town hall immediately knew about it. "Children," Blind Icha decided, "today there is no one to sit at the table with and do business with. My mother, peace be upon her, used to say: You can't make cheese from snowflakes."

After a while everyone left, and only Yarma the Thorn and Kayla the Red remained in the room. Kayla had to leave and went where even the emperor walks alone on foot. The two men were left alone, and Yarma opened and said: "Ichelle, Kayla told me everything. You don't need to be ashamed. We are both men, not soft kids. After all, she was yours before. You are like a father to her. Good health to you."

Icha was silent. For a moment his tongue went numb, and then he explained:

"My blood was boiling from lying down. I was so hot. I asked her to shut up."

"We both swore by the clap of our hands that there would be no secrets between us. She had to tell me."

"Well, you're a loyal friend. Give me a hand!"

And blind Icha took Yarma's hand and squeezed it so hard that he almost screamed in pain.

"Oh, you are strong as iron," Yerma complimented him. "May the demon enter your unclean croaker!"

"Sometimes I feel like I've reached the end of the road," Icha admitted.

"Iche, come to us when you get out of here. We will take care of you as if you were our father."

"Huh? Why do I deserve this? Yarmela, you'll go far. And don't forget that there was once an Icha in the world."

Evening was beginning to fall as Yarma and Kayla returned from the hospital to the Jewish area, between Iron Street and Gnoina Street. From the square and the surrounding houses, it seemed that the street itself was filled with only questionable types. But in reality, the street was full of devout Jews, respectable women, synagogues and seminaries. There were many “cheders,” even yeshivahs. In the Hasidic seminaries, “Shalshides” were already being eaten, and anyone passing by the gates could hear the Jews singing “Bnei Hichla.” Women sat by the open windows and said, “God of Abraham…” 11 Both Yarma and Kayla came from respectable families of observant Jews. Yarma’s uncle was a thief, but his father was a respectable farv, a devout Jew who sent his son to study in a “cheder” and even a yeshiva in Lublin. Kayla’s father was a chametz in the tailors’ prayer house in her hometown. On Shabbat, especially near the end of Shabbat, before three stars appeared in the sky, a silent black bitterness would fall upon Yarma and Kayla. Both of their fathers, and Kayla's mother, were already lying in the cemetery. Kayla never forgot to light a candle for her parents on the anniversary of their death, even though she had sunk deeper into the mire. Somewhere out there, she had a brother and two sisters. They led a decent life and erased her name and memory from the tablet of their hearts. Yarma had an old mother, and she also had a brother. The two of them, Yarma and Kayla, did not come from a garbage heap, as they say. Kayla used to proudly tell people that her grandfather had learned a book of Gemara as big as a table. Sometimes, when Yarma would meet a "Heder" boy on the street with a book under his arm, he would stop him and test him to see if he remembered the chapters of Torah he had learned. Yarama even knew the first page of Baba Metzia by heart, 12 but always declared that he was an Epicurean and openly claimed that there was no God. Kayla, on the other hand, believed in God, demons and spirits, and the evil eye. When the two approached their house, three stars were already standing above the tin roofs, and the moon was floating high above. Kayla blessed her husband:

"Yarmal, have a good week!"

"Have a good week, happy new year."

"May we have a blessed, lucky week," Kayla exclaimed.

"Yes, I wish."

Yarma and Kayla needed a little luck. Kayla hadn't made a penny since their wedding. What would she make? Yarma hadn't been in business for a long time either. In the old days he had been a risk-taker, not afraid to stop and do anything if he had a chance to make a profit. But since he had married the red Kayla he had become a bit soft. He was afraid to risk his freedom. Yarma knew very well that if they put him in prison, Kayla would have no choice and she would have to go back to the whorehouse. He also got used to eating on time, going to bed at a reasonable hour, not too late, lying on a properly made bed, wearing a clean shirt and clean underwear, eating home-cooked food like they cooked in Wysokie, his hometown. The thought of sitting behind bars filled him with fear. He shuddered at the prospect of being beaten by the guards, of eating the coarse bread and stale soup of the unicorn. Yerma also began to feel sorry for those who stole from him, most of them poor people who worked hard to be able to buy something. Every piece of clothing, every shirt, cost them their little savings. Sometimes he would say this to his good friends in the tavern, and they would argue with him:

"Yarmal, you are becoming soft-hearted."

"I'm not righteous," Yarma apologized, "but when you eat pork, the fat dripping down your chin should shine with pleasure."

He longed to bring in a worthy "hit," a business that would bring in a lot of profits, and was carried away by all sorts of dreams and hallucinations. In the meantime, he ate from the prepared food. He had even devoured Kayla's savings. Outwardly, he put on the airs of someone who lacked nothing. He held a fason, as they say, and spent more money than he could afford. Like, for example, the delicacies and flowers he brought today to Blind Icha. The people of Shlomo knew very well that all this was nothing but a game of images.

third

That Saturday evening, the couple wanted to go to the theater, to a show from America called "Uncle Sam." Yerma bought tickets for the front rows, paying one ruble per ticket. The husband and wife hurried to have dinner - a royal feast. They scraped up what was left at home: a fish tail that Shekaila had

prepared for Shabbat, a challah that had been baked on Shabbat eve, half a salted fish, and a jar of leven that Shekaila - the good housewife - had put on ice in the basement on Friday.

Yarma repeated that Kayla knew how to cook feasts fit for kings. She was a master at buying bargains at the market in Yanes's yard. Instead of paying two kopecks for an egg, she would buy cracked eggs that the merchants were selling for half the price. Instead of expensive cuts of meat - spondra, breast, shoulder - which cost twenty kopecks a liter, 13 she got all kinds of cheap parts of poultry: chicken and goose heads, legs, intestines, gizzards. From all of these she made meat dishes and soups that tasted wonderful. "The taste of heaven, a thousand and a thousand flavors," Yarma raved. Well, even Korach's treasures run out if you eat your savings. Yarma and Kayla were seriously thinking about a trip to America or Buenos Aires. But such a trip costs a lot of money. And besides, if you arrive in America without a penny in your pocket, you have to go to a workshop and work fourteen hours a day ironing trousers. In general, there was a crisis in New York that year. Letters from there told of prolonged strikes and hungry workers searching for leftover food in garbage cans. It was better to come to Buenos Aires with live goods, not empty-handed. Yarama had already tasted hard work in his life. In his youth, he was an apprentice to tailors. His father sent him to a tailor to learn a trade. But instead of teaching him the secrets of the trade, he was ordered to empty the cesspool and rock the baby's cradle. They even cut back on the amount of bread they gave him. Here, in Warsaw, too, the workers worked hard, from dawn until dusk, despite the authorities in St. Petersburg issuing an order to shorten the working day. Craftsmen walked around in torn and tattered clothes, lived in basements, contracted tuberculosis, and coughed up blood from their lungs.

Yarma and Kayla ate quickly, so as to leave early and save themselves the need to hire a carriage or even take a tram to the theater. But when they left the gate they saw that it was already too late to walk to Abozhnye Street. 14 They would not have arrived in time even if they had taken a tram. So the husband and wife sat down in the carriage. Yarma said:

"Forty kopecks won't change the situation. Everything is the same. The devil will take the money."

"Forty kopecks is enough for us for a whole day," Kayla argued against him.

On Shabbat, the square was more or less empty. The shops were closed. On Shabbat, everyone rested: those who traded in stolen property, the stall owners who offered lottery tickets with a chance to win yeast cakes and cheesecakes, the snack sellers - chickpeas, lemonade, stuffed potatoes, hot beans, roasted chestnuts - everyone rested on Shabbat. On Shabbat nights, not even the prostitutes stood by

the gates waiting for customers. But as soon as the lights came on and Jews performed Havdalah, everything changed. The square was filled with a crowd of men in dark clothes, and looked like a round bun with a lot of poppy seeds sprinkled on it. 15 Loud shouts could be heard from the dense crowd. From the open windows, gramophones played American hymns, excerpts from cantor songs, songs from famous plays. There was also a song with hints of profanity, which had been very fashionable in recent days:

Push and pull - it's a wet secret

Everyone knows how good it is,

And the hardworking doctors

They will be happy later...

Yerma urged the coachman to drive faster, because he did not want to arrive in the middle of the first act. But the crowds that had filled the street blocked the passage. Moreover, as almost always, a fire had broken out, and the fire brigade with the first aid carriage rushed to the scene with a bang. Smoke rose from one of the houses, flames burst from the attic window. Ahead of the fire brigade vehicles, which were honking and ringing loudly, a herald raced, warning passersby of the danger. He had to whip the heads of the crowd to make way for the galloping horses. It was a wonder that people were not trampled in the commotion. It was not easy to travel on the other streets either. The carriage crossed Gnoina Street, Granitsa, went out onto Krolewska, and from there crossed Prozshenka to reach Abozhne Street. On Krołębska Street, the carriage passed a section of the Saski Garden. The two, Yarma and Kayla, breathed deeply and inhaled the scent of the chestnut trees, whose tops rose above the iron fence. Jews in long capes and Jewish women in foreign hats and wigs were not allowed to enter this garden, and those who wanted to enjoy the fresh air were forced to sit outside, on the edge of the concrete railing into which the iron bars of the fence were embedded.

Thank God, luckily for them, the show started late. Yarma and Kayla managed to find their seats in the hall before the curtain even rose. In their row were people the couple knew from the tavern. The good friends hurried to treat Yarma to a handful of nuts, and one of the prostitutes treated Kayla to poppy-covered chocolate cookies. But what unfolded on stage was so fascinating, so magnificent and colorful, that the two didn't even have time to thank each other for the refreshments.

On the stage was a New York millionaire's lounge, with a gilded piano, luxurious furniture, carpets, and sparkling chandeliers. At the center of the stage stood the millionaire and his wife. The millionaire wore a top hat and an elegant tailcoat, and his wife wore a hat decorated with peacock feathers and a dress with a long train. The millionaire introduced his wife to a young immigrant who had just come off the ship from Poland: a pretty, greenish girl, scantily dressed. The millionaire's name was Sam, and the millionaire's name was Bessie. Sam said to Bessie: 16 "Bessie, my dear, this is Cirelle, my sister's daughter from Pinczew. My sister, Beile-Gittel, may she rest in peace in heaven, left me a will. She asked me to bring Cirelle, her only daughter, to America, and to take care of her as if she were my own daughter. She asked me to provide her with a good education. God has not blessed us, Bessie, with children. Therefore, from this day forward, Cirelle will be like a daughter to us. I will be her father, and you, Bessie, will be her mother. We will send her to study at the best universities, dress her like a princess, and marry her to a handsome young man who has received a good education. And God willing, after a hundred and twenty years, we will bequeath our property to her. After all, no one lives forever, not even in the land of Columbus."

A storm of applause broke out in the hall as soon as Sam finished speaking. The three of them - Sam, Zirla and Bessie - bowed deeply to the audience. As soon as silence returned to the hall, Bessie took out her pince-nez, brought them closer to her eyes and looked Zirla up and down. She studied her for a long time with a distant look, and finally said: "Sam, my dear husband, you made plans without consulting me. I am the landlady, and I would never let a green beast like your Tsirla into my house . Look, Sam, look at how she is dressed: rags. She doesn't know English. She only knows that damn jargon, Yiddish. That filthy Polish woman will never be like a daughter in our house. On my dead body! Sam, if you know what is good for you, send her straight back to where she came from. If not, you will see what will happen. My brother the judge will expel you both from America and send you back together to your pig country. You will be again what you were thirty years ago: a shoemaker's apprentice in Pinczew. A beggar twice seven." Suppressed grumblings rose from the hall, and in a few minutes they turned into an angry roar. Someone shouted, "Old Coop!", and threw a rotten potato at the American lady.

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During the break between the first and second acts, Kayla remained in her place, and Yarma went out to smoke a cigarette. Suddenly, he heard a strange man's thin voice calling his name, which sounded familiar. A tiny figure pushed through the crowded crowd and approached Yarma. The man was bald, without a beard or mustache, in a fancy suit and yellow shoes, and a tie with gold threads woven into it. Three pearls were stuck like purple in the wide loop of his tie. The man leaned on a cane with a silver handle. Yarma could not recognize the stranger, even though his face and voice were familiar to him.

Yarma wondered: Who carries a cane in the theater? Why didn't he leave it in the dressing room? But at that moment he noticed the limp, and remembered who the man was: Max the Lame. Yarma looked at him in astonishment. The two of them had sat together for three months in a holding cell, inside the armory on Deluga Street! It was an old story, four years ago, maybe five. Yarma was in prison for theft, and Lame Max - for trying to exchange counterfeit banknotes at a bank. In those days, Max had blond hair, and on his face was a well-groomed mustache whose waxed ends curled upwards like two inverted wigs. Lame Max was ten years older than Yarma, and yet they became friends in the cell and became friends in heart and soul. They became so close to each other that Max tried to convince Yarma to cooperate with him in the future. But Yarma was transferred from the armory to the prison in the fortress, and since then he has not seen Lame Max. After he served his sentence and was released, he heard that Lame Max had gone somewhere abroad. Probably to America. Those who sailed overseas were forgotten by heart, because in the eyes of those who remained in Poland they were considered dead. And here, Lame Max is standing next to him and calls out in his thin, nasal voice:

"Yarmela, it's you! You don't know me, do you? I'm Max, Max Levitas. May the devil enter you, Yarmela!"

"Yes, I know you," answered Yarma. "Where is your hair? Did you sell it to a barber, or to a foreign wig maker?"

"I've long forgotten that I ever had hair," Max smiled, revealing two sparse rows of teeth as sharp as shark teeth. "I maintain that those who live, go through everything. For better or worse. I was thinking of you today. That it will be good for you! I thought, I wonder where Yerma has gone. I already thought they cut out your lungs in prison, that you're in heaven, with all the saints. But what do you say? Nettles and weeds don't go away. You look good, you son of a bitch! Stick a spoon in!"

Max held out a narrow hand to Yarma, with slender fingers and manicured nails—long and shiny. On one finger was a gold ring set with diamonds, and on the other a signet ring. He got rich, the bastard, Yarma thought, and after a moment he said:

"Where did you go? You disappeared like a stone in mighty waters. They said you ran away to America."

"America, huh? Everything is America. New York is America, Buenos Aires is America, and Brazil is America too. In New York you have to work to live, and in Brazil you do America. Have you heard of a country like that, huh? When it's night here, day there, and in our winter there's summer there."

"So where are you, in Brazil?"

"In Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, New York, Chicago, even California. Anywhere better than here, with the Russians. 18 And you, where are you stuck? Still in that little street, Krochmalena? I passed by there in a carriage, and I couldn't breathe from the stench. Sewer pipes. Sewers with standing water. A girl threw garbage out the window just as I passed by in a carriage. A basket full of garbage! It was not far, a hair's breadth, that all that filth would fall on my head."

"You're becoming so gentle, aren't you?" Yarma asked.

"What are you doing now? Still a thief, like before?" Max answered him with a question.

"No. I became a rabbi."

"Well, wonders! What a world! Exactly what is written in the books happened to us: 'Tora with Tora does not meet, man with man meets.' 19 Do you still remember anything from the small print?"

"Yes. I know. Two mountains can't meet, but two people can."

"Shukha, my brother! He remembers! What do you think of the play? Do you like it, huh? Just American trash. In New York, everyone made fun of this play. There's a theater critic there who turned it into dust and ashes. 'Empty nonsense,' he called it. I was in New York right when the premiere was staged, and when I'm in New York, I go straight to the theater. I'm not a gentile. I've remained Jewish. I like to hear a Jewish word. And here I am, buying the local newspaper and seeing that this play is also being performed in Warsaw. Well, I think to myself, let's see it again. There they laughed at this play, but here, I see, they're licking their fingers. And you, did you come to the theater alone?"

"I'm here with my wife," Yarma answered after a slight hesitation.

"You got married, huh? Well, congratulations. Who is this? One of our people?"

"She is not a rabbi."

"Where did you scratch her? In a brothel?"

"Not in a holy place."

"Well, the same Yarma. Comrades. My brother is so old, it would be worth coming to Warsaw. I have nothing to do here. But I was in Paris and thought to myself: I should pop over to Warsaw for a moment. After all, this is our old home, as they say. After all, we all come from the same mikveh. I also have a family: in Warsaw, in Bradum, in the small towns in the poverty kingdom of the Lublin region. A wedding is a wedding. Anything at the time. You can have a thousand women. You do what you do to them, sleep with them and throw them away. Suddenly one is attached to you, and you can't get rid of her. Isn't that how it is, huh?"

"What about you?" Yarma asked.

"I've been through it all. Not one, not two, not three, but four. Four, really. That's all well and good as long as everything's okay. But when they start showing their teeth and claws, I send them to hell. You have to know how to get rid of them. Otherwise you're stuck in a lot of trouble. Love starts with cucinio and mucinio, but before you look here and there, they want to swallow you alive. Like that female spider devouring her male. Are you here at the theater with your wife?"

"Yes. Here."

"Come. Introduce me to her. I promise not to take her from you. I will only give you a wedding present."

"I don't need any gifts."

"The bell is ringing already. They're calling you in. Where are you sitting? I'm sitting in the middle of the first row. Listen, we're going to have a party. Let's raise a glass to you, you old fox. Oh, as soon as I saw you, I started celebrating. I don't know why. I'll wait for you after the next act. Bring your wife with you."

The crowd pushed in, and the lame Max started running on his limp legs. He shouted something in Yarma's direction, but Yarma didn't hear. He took a last drag from his cigarette and threw the burning butt away, despite the sign prohibiting throwing burning cigarettes on the floor. He couldn't decide whether he was happy to run into the lame Max or not. The man seemed to have become a great gentleman. Yarma felt a kind of embarrassment next to him. He was ashamed to reveal his true condition to him. It's true that it's not written on his forehead that he's in trouble, but guys like Max aren't suckers and can't be worked on. What evil demon brought this blow on him? Yarma wondered for a moment if he shouldn't go away and let Max wait, let him sweat a little. But he immediately realized that nothing would help. Max knows the tavern. He'll get there too. Well, he's lost.

Yarma went to the seventh row, where his seat was. But in his chair, next to Kayla, sat an old woman with gray-blue hair. She wore a large hat decorated with ostrich feathers. The two women were engrossed in their conversation and did not notice Yarma approaching his seat. Suddenly the old woman looked up, called out, "There he is!" and stood up with a swing. The ostrich feathers moved vigorously and the hat almost fell off her head. Now Yarma saw her face. The heavy blush that covered her cheeks only highlighted the wrinkles that deepened as she opened her mouth and asked: "Yarma, huh? I know. I know everything. I knew your wife before you even met her. Small world, huh? The main thing is health. Kayla is like a daughter to me. She will tell you everything. Let's not make ourselves strangers! A fine sight, huh? A piece of America!" The woman began to move away, making her way between the seats. Here they didn't get up from their chairs to greet people on the other side. Her knees bumped into Yerma. A heavy scent of perfume wafted from her, mixed with a slight stench, of mustiness and old age. Finally Yerma reached the chair, and Kayla hurried to say:

"Oh, Yarmela, you just came out and she saw me and came running. She covered me with kisses. At first I barely knew who she was. She wants to come with us after the show to grab a bite."

"Who is this?"

"She is from Potchefstroom."

"Your aunt from back in the day?"

"No. Her sister-in-law."

"Someone infected me too," Yarma revealed after a slight hesitation. "Kayla, we're not allowed to go out anywhere. Every time someone gets sick. We have to get out of Warsaw. Once and for all!" he concluded in an excited voice.

“Who infected you?” Kayla asked.

"One I was in prison with, six years ago. He went somewhere in America, or the devil knows where. Suddenly he came back."

"What's his name?"

"Lame Max."

"Lame Max is in Warsaw?!"

"What happened? Do you know him?"

"He used to come to us in Potsdam. Yes. I know him," Kayla chuckled, her words sounding slurred.

Yerma became completely tense and asked sharply:

"Your pimp?"

"No. But he would come and make messes. Really funny, rolling his tongue endlessly. He would do such tricks that we would all burst out laughing."

“Did you have affairs with him? Did you hook up with him?” Yarma asked, anger getting stuck in his throat.

"No. Yes. Maybe," Kayla stammered and suddenly burst out: "Why are you questioning me like that? You know who I am. You yourself said that what was - was. That now you don't care."

"No, no. Shut up!"

The curtain rose. Yerma felt a lump in his throat. His ears were burning. What was happening to me? He wondered at himself. What kind of shame had befallen him - his miserable condition, the woman he had married. I must escape from here - he decided. I will go to the end of the world! Oh, he told himself, if I can get so excited, I must love her very much. He remembered a joke someone had told him, about a man who bet that he would eat a bowl full of garbage. In the middle of eating he began to spit and clear his throat. They asked him what had happened, and he replied: "I found a hair inside..."

the

Kayla sat silent throughout the second act. Things on stage moved at a rapid pace: Uncle Sam gave Tsirla a fat dowry, a check for fifty thousand dollars—a hundred thousand rubles!—and Tsirla married a rich man named Leslie. But she was not happy. Leslie went to cabarets, balls, parties, and flirted with foreign women. Tsirla loved to sit in her luxurious house, walk in the gardens, read books, and do charity. She also sent money and letters of invitation to her relatives in Pinchev, so that they could come to her in America. Things came to such a point that husband and wife became complete strangers to each other. During this time, Bessie, Uncle Sam's wife, fell ill. Doctors came and went, and none of them could help her. The illness stirred noble feelings in Aunt Bessie's heart. She suddenly began to realize how wretched and foolish was the haughty pride that had accompanied her for years. Now she drew closer to Cirla, and between the two former rivals a true friendship blossomed. At this point the curtain fell. Kayla, who had been sitting hunched over and silent all the time, sank into thought and said:

"You'll see that Aunt Bessie will die, and then Cirella will divorce Leslie and marry her uncle."

"Yes. That's what it looks like," agreed Yerma. "I'm going out to smoke again."

“Yarma, I don’t want to meet that dirty guy, lame Max!” Kayla cried.

"What's up? He won't eat you."

"Yarmela, I want to forget everything. I want to have one man and one God. I want to erase everything that used to be. As if nothing ever happened. Yarmela, let's go, it doesn't matter where. Let's go to a place where they don't know us. Let's start all over again."

Is she guessing my thoughts, or what? - thought Yarma, but said aloud: "Anyway, we need money. No matter what we want to do. Without sweets a person is like without an arm. I'll be back soon." He didn't feel like seeing lame Max again either. But the man was standing by the wardrobe, a cigar stuck in his mouth. He seemed to be waiting for Yarma. His eyes smiled as soon as he noticed him. He quickly removed the cigar from his mouth, and asked:

"Where are you sitting? I want to meet your wife."

"You know my wife, and she knows you," Yarma replied.

"Like this? Who is this? What's her name?"

"Kayla. Red Kayla. You messed with her in Potchefstroom."

Yerma spat out the words. Max's face hardened for a moment, and seemed to freeze and stiffen with excitement. But his dark eyes, elongated like two plums, immediately sparkled and were filled with a mocking gleam. Max read:

"Is that the story? Then you deserve double congratulations. We are close, like two brothers-in-law. May your impure bowels burn!"

"I have thousands of brothers-in-law like that. You don't impress me, you old scoundrel!"

"Yes, that's right! Listen to a story! Red Kayla! You'll think I'm just messing with your head, but you should know that I thought about her. The years passed, and I forgot about her. And then, last night I woke up suddenly, and the first thought that crossed my mind was - what happened to Red Kayla? I may have even dreamed about her. As soon as I close my eyes, I have dreams. All the dead reappear, and I'm in Warsaw again: here and there, and where not? How did it even get to this point, huh? She was Blind Icha's stuff! She had a big mouth, and she poured out words endlessly. When she would burst out cursing, it was a kind of tongue-twister that had everyone holding their stomachs with laughter. When she said 'May you be blessed' to someone, she would give him his father-in-law, until he barely came out of it whole. Someone told me that she caught syphilis and went to hell. Well, that's a mistake. What "To do, a mistake. My head is a complete mess. No. Not Kayla, but Bayle. Now I remember. It's clear. Bayle-Baylik was her name. She really was half chicken."

"Bile-Beylik has been in that world for a long time. She left this world three years ago. She died in the sanctuary."

"That's it. That's what happened! Well, listen, it's a real story. I replaced Bayle with Kayle. Come on, take me to her. I can't wait until the third act is over. I hardly knew you back then. But the red Kayle changed the world. How old is she, about?"

"Twenty-nine years old."

"No more? Well, so be it."

"Even if she's older, it's lost. It doesn't matter to me."

"Females never age. They just get younger year by year. What are you doing? Really, it's as if it were destined in heaven for us to meet. Who else do I have in Warsaw, besides you and the red Kayla? Come!"

The lame Max jumped, and the cane with the silver handle seemed to fly in front of him as if by magic. The man is lame, but he jumps like a flea, thought Yarma. Kayla got up. Maybe she was going to go to the bathroom. But in that moment, Max was next to her. Yarma saw him take her in his arms, kiss her. How come I'm suddenly jealous of her, right now, and I wasn't jealous about that thing with blind Icha? A fierce hatred attacked him. He hated Max, Kayla, himself. Max and Kayla kissed passionately. They literally sucked each other. They hugged and moved as if he were her lost brother. A moment later, Yarma approached. "I'll drink the bitter cup to the bottom," he decided. He heard Max calling out: "Kayla, you haven't grown up at all. You're getting younger. May a strange death attack me if it's not true. How can you imagine such a thing? It turns out that Yarm is only doing you good. We were both in prison together, and we became like brothers. Who knew then that he would one day be your man. Really, this is something to write about in the newspapers. Here he is. We must celebrate, as God commanded. We will do it tonight. I will not save up to return to America with the money. I will finance everything. As the Hasidim say? Everything is at the expense of the gentleman. This is truly the finger of God, if this is how I have come to this journey. I am traveling in the second class on the train and I think to myself: What will I do in Warsaw? What do I have there besides going to visit the graves of my ancestors? As the saying goes? You have set out on a long journey, you have gone far from the heart. We become strangers. We forget. Far from sight, far from the heart. I even debated whether to go to the theater or No. An old play. I already know in advance what it will be. But something inside me told me to go. I enter, and who comes in front of me? - Yarma is a thief. I swear I've already thought about reversing the cartwheel and doing a 'return.' 22 I have relatives in the small towns, but I'm afraid to see them. They grow old before their time there. They grow long beards, and look like holy Jews. And the beard? - Today it's black, tomorrow it'll be white. Hey, Yarma, do you like champagne?"

"Not today."

"We'll drink champagne today. Where can we go? I'd like to find a homey place, to be among the people of our country."

"Eliezer's tavern is a homely place."

"In Crookhamalena?"

"I won't go to Eliezer's tavern!" Kayla shouted.

"Why not?" Yarma asked.

"You know why."

"No. I don't know."

"What kind of tavern is this?" Max asked. "I've already forgotten where it is."

"Krókamalna number seventeen."

"Oh, yes, yes. We'll take a carriage and go straight there. I want to meet whoever is left to meet. How is Blind Iche? What is he doing?"

"Blind Iche is lying in a hospital," Kayla replied.

"What happened?"

"Someone stabbed him."

"Who? Well, well, well. What a world! In America, all the thugs are Gentiles. There are also a few Jews, but you hardly see them. They don't move there without a gun. A knife is something ancient in their eyes. When gangsters quarrel, they immediately pull out their fire spit. Phew! And you're already eliminated. Non-existent. 23 When a conflict breaks out within the mafia, not a day goes by without a few corpses. In Argentina, they stab a knife, but only for one reason: jealousy. A Spaniard has hot blood. If you just glance at his female, you're not sure she'll continue to live. Of course, this happens as long as love burns.

When they cool off, they send their dulcinia out into the street to sell herself for a few pesos. They call their currency the peso. There's a kind of weather there that makes women age prematurely. It's too hot there. You walk down the street and see a tree laden with oranges. The heat It makes your blood boil and your veins heat up. Even the women's. The Spaniard doesn't let his daughter go out on the street without an escort to watch over her. If they let her go out alone, she comes back with a protruding belly. Anyway, a person with a knack for it, who knows how to take advantage of an opportunity, can make a fortune there. There they're not ashamed to go to a whore. Everyone goes. When Shabbat comes, the whorehouses are full and overflowing. The problem is that the females don't stay nice and fresh for long. There, Kayleshi, you wouldn't flourish like you do here. They serve for a few years, and then they're thrown in the trash. After a few years they're completely worn out, and you have to bring in new merchandise."

"I wouldn't go there even if they gave me a bag full of gold."

"I'm talking about the girls, not the aunts. Bringing merchandise is one thing, and being merchandise is another."

"I want to be a human being, not a commodity. I don't want to hear about such a commodity."

"We'll talk and talk. You know what? Let's go and get a carriage. The third act isn't interesting at all. Tsirla divorces the charlatan, Bessie falls behind, and Tsirla marries the uncle. For gentiles, this is forbidden, but for Jews, it's allowed. Marrying an uncle is kosher. But with the aunt - prey. And really, what's the difference? That's how Moses wanted it."

"I want to stay and sit here until the end of the show," Kayla said.

"Well, ring the bell. Listen to me, we'll meet soon."

Max hurried to the front row, and Yarma whispered in Kayla's ear:

"How do you say? The deaf man heard how the mute man said to the blind man: Look how the lame

man runs - - -"

"Yarmal, I don't want to go to the tavern with him."

"Huh? I don't want to either. But he's stuck like a tick. Maybe he'll offer us some business."

"What kind of business? I want you to stay with me and, God forbid, not fall into the hands of the Gentiles. God forbid!"

"What can I do? Be patient?"

"You don't have to do anything. We'll drive, no matter where, and I'll go to work."

"What are you going to do? Go out and herd geese?"

"For you I am willing to be a servant."

"Nonsense. We're used to easy money. I'm not just some swindler. But if he offers me ship tickets, we'll go to Argentina. In the end, I'll pay him back everything with interest."

"Yarma, I'm not willing to take even a penny from him."

"From the way you showered him with hugs and kisses, I thought you missed him terribly. You really loved him, life was in danger!"

"I pounced on him?! He threw himself at me like a robber. He almost laid me down. Yarmele, I don't want to go back to the mud!" Kayla cried out sternly.

"Well, don't worry. I won't force you to do anything. Here, the third act begins."

and

On their way back, the carriage passed Alexander Square, passed the huge Orthodox church that the Russians had built, turned onto Bank Square and reached the gate of Iron Street. 24 Every time they passed a new street, Max jumped out of his seat and pointed with his finger - a sign that he recognized the street and remembered it. Back in the day, they had planned to rob a bank on Bank Square, but nothing came of it. Everything blew up. Here, a bank is not a bank, it's a fortress. In America, they don't make a deal about a bank. There, a bank is like just a store.

They passed by the gate of Iron Street and saw that the windows of the Viennese lounge were lit. They must have been holding a wedding party there. Krochmalna Street was dark, but Eliezer's tavern was open and full of guests. At the entrance, a night of smells descended on them: beer, Yisrael, garlic, roasted goose, chopped liver with fried onions. In the nearby bakery, pretzels and rolls were already being baked, and the smell of the pastries filled the air. Everyone was sitting there: Shmuel Shemant, the fat Rachel, the long-drying Leibush, Shaya the presser, Rebecca the sleepy, Motka the burnt - everyone who had come to visit the sick at the blind Icha today. Everyone knew Max the lame and welcomed him with hugs and kisses, with shouts of joy, with pats on the shoulder. They dragged chairs from the other tables, making room for the three of them: Yarma, the red Kayla, and Max the lame. Eliezer, the owner of the tavern, came out to meet them in a blue apron and with sleeves rolled up to the elbow. He himself served mugs of beer and accompanying delicacies: salty poppy seed cookies, sausage, smoked brisket, sausages Liver, stuffed intestines straight from the hot pot, sauerkraut salad and mustard. Lame Max announced in advance that he was paying for them all. Shmuel Shemant - a tall, fat man with a huge belly, in a colorful bra from which a silver watch chain dangled, asked:

"Yarmal, where did you scratch it?"

"In the theater."

"Well, we won't sleep tonight. Kids, it's a holiday!"

Shmuel Shemant pounded his fist on the oak table, and all the jugs and plates clinked. "Who wants a cigar?" asked the lame Max, and immediately began handing out cigars. Shmuel Shemant, who had smoked cigars all those years, looked with a mocking smile at those who had never touched a cigar and suddenly started smoking. They didn't know exactly how to smoke a cigar, but they didn't give up. After all, they got the cigars for free! Shmuel Shemant stretched out two fingers, carefully took the cigar, tilted his head, brought it close to his nostrils, and said appreciatively:

"My, the way you see me, it's a Havana cigar! Oh, Maxelle, I can't believe it!"

"It's tobacco, not gold."

"You must have cooked some fat soup there!" he complimented him for the long drying.

"America is a rich country. You just have to know what to do," Max answered him.

Yarma leaned over to Kayla and warned her in a whisper not to drink. He knew Kayla would be able to keep herself together as long as she didn't get drunk. Lately she had been in too many gloomy moods. She was constantly worried that something bad would happen to Yarma - that he might get sick, God forbid, or that someone would spread false rumors about him. Only at night, in bed, did her self-confidence return to her. Yarma himself could not help but refrain from drinking and overindulging. Their Shabbat table was sparse today, and the matchmaker's feast that Kayla had prepared was so small that it was barely enough for one tooth. The American wealth presented to him on the theater stage whetted his appetite. He was hungry and thirsty for real change. A strong need, a desperate desire to do something attacked him. But he watched Kayla's drinking rhythm with concern. The woman sipped glasses of Yisrael, one after the other. She also mixed Yisrael with beer. Everyone drank, everyone ate, and everyone talked at once, shouting at each other. Fat Rachel, who was so fat that her buttocks took up two chairs, tried to smoke a cigar, and her no-nonsense attempt provoked a riot of laughter, shouting, and applause.

More guests joined the large table, and Max - excited by intoxication - exclaimed that everyone could have a good time at their own expense, eating and drinking without limit. Eliezer the bartender remarked with a half-joke that Max might still be left without money for the journey back to the distant land from which he had come. Max heard, and immediately pulled out a wallet full and overflowing with Russian banknotes: twenty-five rubles, fifty, and even a hundred. He handed Eliezer two banknotes with

a portrait of Tsarina Catherine on them - one hundred rubles each: "Here's my money, come on. Don't do it in your pants..."

Kayla's face was as red as fire from drinking, and her eyes were as green as wild grapes. She laughed, clapping her hands. It wasn't long before she started kissing all the men. Even the strangers who joined them from the other tables. Kayla shouted:

"Maxella, take me to America!"

"tonight?"

"Maxella, come dance!"

Yarma was embarrassed. Although he too had been drinking to the point of drunkenness, Kayla's behavior embarrassed him. She grabbed Max, who was limping, by the hand and began to drag him. His cane fell and Kayla picked it up with one hand, the other holding Max. Her dress rose as she bent over, and her lace-embroidered panties peeked out from behind. She didn't notice. Dragging Max, she screamed as if possessed. Yarma tried to remind her with words and hand signals that Max was disabled and couldn't dance. But Kayla shouted, "Yarmela, don't be afraid and don't tremble! He won't steal my virginity!" and burst into wild laughter, shaking Max and showering kisses on his bald head.

"Drunk like Lot," Shmuel Shemant commented.

"The same red Kayla. Hasn't changed," groaned the plump Rachel.

"Too bad, blind Icha is lying in the hospital." He growled at the long drying.

"She still has all the energy left! Iron strength!" concluded Rebekah the Shlompherite, aunt of two brothels, with appreciation.

Prostitutes, who had been standing by the gates until late at night, waiting for customers, discovered that there was a revelry at Eliezer's tavern and came running. They stood on the threshold, crowded and cramped, in orange-golden shoes, oval jackets, green and yellow socks. Red blush was applied to their cheeks, blue eyeshadow on their eyelids, and a black line surrounded their eyes like a thick frame. They all burst into resounding laughter: "Mother! My mother, the crown of my head! I can't help myself anymore! Just look, a chicken coop! Kayla, listen, the red Kayla! Leave the lame old man alone! Oh mother, I'm bursting with laughter!" The pimps, who were watching over the prostitutes and making sure that they didn't just chatter but waited for customers, hurried to shoo the prostitutes out, back into the street. They appeared in tight coats, narrow trousers, long-brimmed caps and high boots. They pushed the prostitutes, slapped them and pulled their hair. One fat prostitute roared: "Hey, idiot, leave!" Another, a thin young woman, fell to the sawdust-covered stone floor, and a tall guy pushed her with the toe of his boot and spat on her. Eliezer ran to the agitated group and shouted: "What's all this commotion? Get your feet up and get out! This is a tavern, not a pigsty!" The fat Rachel raised her coarse voice and belched: "They'll come in and get fat here."

An old night watchman, who watched over the shops and businesses, heard the commotion and came to see what was going on. He was wearing a padded military uniform and a thick woolen beret, even though it was a summer night. The watchman banged his stick on the ground, waved the bunch of keys in his hand, and shouted something from the white tuft of his beard and mustache. The red-haired Kayla broke away from Max and ran to the old man with arms spread wide: "Grandpa, come dance!" She grabbed his shoulders, and he struggled to free himself from her. They both stumbled and fell, and she tried to pick him up. The prostitutes burst into mocking laughter and one fell into her friend's arms with thunderous joy. Yarma tried to pull the old watchman out of Kayla's grasp, and she shouted at him: "Yarma, you thief, this is none of your business! He's my grandfather, not yours! You piece of filth!"

At that moment, a wild rage seized Yarma. He punched Kayla right in the nose. She staggered and fell on her back, face up and her dress torn. Kayla writhed and wailed in a melodious wailing voice:

"Robber, murderer, slanderer, fever in your pig bones! A pile of warts on your tongue!"

"Kayla, you'll regret your words!" Yerma waved a threatening finger at her.

"What's there to be sorry about? You keep me like an animal in a cage. You don't give me food. All I hear

is: love, love, love. I'll go with Max to Buenos Aires, and there I'll start a new life. If you want to be righteous in a long fur coat, find yourself a decent girl. I was a whore, and I'll always be a whore. Isn't that right, Max?"

"If you say..."

"Can you find me a man in Buenos Aires?"

"More than one, but - - -"

"Do you hear, Yarma? I'm still worth something. It's worth sinning for me."

Kayla burst out laughing, coughing and clearing her throat. She started to choke. The words caught in her throat.

Shmuel Shemant leaned towards her:

"Kayla, you can't drink."

"I forgot how to drink. He doesn't bring a drop of Yisrael home. He doesn't have a penny in his pocket. All he knows, this unsuccessful wiseguy, is work with his mouth. I need a man, not some kind of chatty Hasid sitting on the stove."

"We need to pick her up!" Shmuel Shemant shouted in an authoritative voice, as if he were the owner of the house here.

The long-haired man stood up and approached Kayla to pick her up. But Kayla shouted:

"Sit still! I don't need to be carried. I'm not just some dead statue. 25 He sucked my blood, but I'm not dead yet. I'll show the world what the red Kayla can do. Maxella, where do you live? Take me to you."

"Kayla, stop rattling the kettle! Enough! Enough messing with your brain!"

"We will sail on a ship, without syphilis."

Everyone burst out laughing. Everyone understood what she was saying. 26 Yerma turned pale with anger and insult. "Kayla, it's over between us! I swear to God!"

One of the poorest streets in Warsaw. In Shevis - Singer knew it well, because he lived there from the age of four until he was of legal age. He was the son of a teacher (dayan) on the street, and therefore had the opportunity to get to know the lives of the residents there from the inside. (All notes are the translator's, B.R.)

A notorious prison in Warsaw.

Streets located in a poor area of Warsaw. Many Jews lived there, mainly common people. There was a mixture of upright people and underworld people; observant and secular.

The lower house of the parliament in Tsarist Russia. After the October Revolution of 1905, Tsar Nicholas II granted the Duma broader powers than before. But the first Duma was dissolved shortly after it was elected, and the subsequent ones did not last long either.

Reactionary and anti-Semitic circles.

The Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid (1842 - 1918) refused to comply with Herzl's request to grant Jews the right to settle in the Land of Israel.

A town in the Lublin region. It had a large and respectable Jewish community and also gangs of underworld figures. In certain circles, Fiasz was spoken of as a city of sophisticated thieves (like Chełm, which was considered a city of fools, even though it had many smart people...).

In those days, Buenos Aires was the center of a Jewish underworld, and prostitution businesses flourished there.

Suburbs of Warsaw.

This is what Yarama calls the hospital. A sanctuary is a shelter for the poor, sick, and homeless.

The concepts here are related to the custom of Motzei Shabbat. On Shabbat, three meals are eaten; the third meal is called in Yiddish "Shalshids," meaning third meal. The Kabbalistic piyyut "Bnei Hichla" is attributed to Ari, and is traditionally sung before the third meal. The prayer "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob" is said before the Havdalah.

The second tractate (middle section) is among the three tractates in the order of torts in the Mishnah. Its subject is property law that has no bearing on bodily harm.

Originally: pound (liter), about half a kilogram.

The Jewish Theater in Warsaw (the Kaminski Theater) was located on this street.

Originally there is a play on words here. In Yiddish: פלטל (square) - פלצל (a pastry that looks like a round bun or thick pita); behind the word מאן (poppy) is hidden the word מאן (man).

The dialogue in the play emphasizes the difference between the millionaire and his wife. Sam is a Jew of Polish descent, and his Yiddish also contains English words. His wife is a Jew of German descent, and her Yiddish contains German words. German Jews arrived in America before the wave of immigration from Eastern Europe, and treated the new immigrants with condescending disdain.

Pun: The narrator described Tsirla as "Kirkarkat" (beautiful, in the Book of Esther), and Bessie says " Yoruka" (a newly arrived immigrant).

In those days, Poland was under Russian control.

A well-known proverb in Aramaic.

Originally: Affidavit - a sworn statement form in which an American citizen undertakes to provide for the new immigrant's livelihood.

Max speaks here in vernacular, the juicy flavor of which is lost in translation. To maintain the spirit of the words, I have made small changes. The phrase "who blessed" (a blessing that the rabbi blesses the one who ascends to the Torah; in the vernacular it is used with the opposite meaning: insults and slander) appears in the original.

Max plays with words and turns the tables: he begins with a folk idiom, continues with an allusion to the well-known verse, "We have returned you, O Lord, to you, and we will return; our days are renewed as before." (Lamentations 5:21), and ends with a Russian word (נאזאד: return). The transition from the Jewish expression to the Russian word turns the bowl upside down with a stinging allusion to the return that Max is striving for.

Max uses an untranslatable idiom: "Oys Kapelushmächer" - "No hat maker."

The route passes through prominent landmarks in Warsaw: Alexander Square is widely known as the "Square of Three Crosses"; the Russian Church is the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (Sobor); Bank Square (Plac Bankowy) is a financial center near the Saxon Garden. The Central Bank of Poland is located in this square; Iron Street (Zelazna) leads to Krochmalna Street. That's where travelers head.

Originally: Yozel. This is what the Jewish street called the portrait of Jesus (in a statue or painting). The

word carries a tone of mockery and hostility.

In Yiddish, there is an amusing word play here: Schiff (ship) - Sif (syphilis).

Chapter Two

A

Yarma broke his oath. Kayla burst into bitter tears after she sobered up, kissed his feet and begged him to forgive her. She swore by her deceased mother that if he did not forgive her, she would immediately go to the train station and throw herself on the tracks. Kayla tore her hair and slammed her head against the wall. Tears as big as peas washed over her face. In the end, Yarma got her into his bed, and she proved to him that he still did not know all her love interests. Kayla knew how to excite a man and make him happy... Yarma asked who taught her all these tricks, and Kayla named several prostitutes and thieves. She also mentioned a magician, a fortune teller, who had a black mirror in his house. In this mirror you could see beloved men who had disappeared, and also dead people who wanted to connect with those who missed them. She talked about such wild things and told such shocking stories that Yarma's back trembled and shuddered. He could not understand how he had thought of throwing away such a girl, and decided to go to the teacher-teacher to ask him for permission to break his vow.

Yarma met with the lame Max several times. At first, Max declared that he had just dropped by Poland, to take a look at the old streets, visit towns he had known before, and meet old friends. But it gradually became clear that he had plans to cover the travel expenses and perhaps even make a fortune. Throughout South America, especially in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, there was a shortage of fresh females and new goods had to be imported from Europe. The newspapers wrote that traffickers in female sex slaves traveled in sealed carriages, kidnapped innocent girls, raped them, and then transported them to distant lands in handcuffs. But Max claimed that these were fabrications that the poor reporters had sucked out of their fingers. How could you kidnap older women? How could you smuggle them across the border and put them on a ship against their will? Bobkes! Just nonsense! It's only possible if the young women wanted it. For that, you need a man worthy of the name. A man who knows how to seduce can pull these lures and trap as many females as he wants. Some are just waiting to be fixed. New times have arrived. Today's females have no less appetite than men. They don't want to marry some mandrake, conceive and give birth. They don't want to waste their best years in cribs, piles of poopy diapers, pacifiers and toys. You just have to know how to talk to them. Max revealed his plan to Yarma. He wanted the red Kayla to join the business. She has a big mouth and a rolling tongue, just right. She could rake in gold in America. Yarma tried to say that he wanted Kayla only for himself, but Max argued against him: "My brother, Yarma, you talk like a fool! What nonsense! You can't keep anyone just

for yourself. Even a pious rabbi gets married the moment her husband closes his eyes and dies. And Kayla?! Red Kayla can be kept within four walls to run the household and mend her husband's socks, just like you can harness the wind to a plow."

Max gradually discovered his plan. He read a story in an American newspaper about a woman whose business was to marry rich men. After the wedding, she stole their property or cheated them in some way, and went away. Let them stay home and sweat a little. This woman had caught a lot of suckers, a few dozen, and had become really rich. "In Poland, you can do what you do in America," Max claimed. "There are a lot of rich Jews here. A girl like Kayla can earn a few hundred thousand rubles, maybe more." Max added that the two of them - he and Yarma - would use this time to seduce seductive young women. They would seduce a few dozen females and prepare them for a trip to South America. That way, with the wealth Kayla would accumulate and the females they would obtain, the three of them would be able to do wonderfully in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay. They would set up the largest and most luxurious brothels in these countries. They would live there like emperors. In the meantime, both of them - Max and Yarma - could marry a rich widow from time to time. That way they could accumulate more money before going overseas with the shipment. Max argued passionately:

"Yarmal, gold is rolling in the streets. You just have to know how to accumulate it. I, as you see me, am rich as a rock. I could - if I wanted to - buy myself a palace and live like a prince. But that's only good for old age, not at my age. Now I can't sit still. I have thorns in my ass. I have to do something. If I don't, I'll get sick. I think bad thoughts. Yarmal, we're both the same. You're also made of the same dough. That night, when we met at the theater, I took just one look at you, and I knew we had to be partners. Your Kayla is a treasure. Something-something. Phew-puff!"

"What do you want, for us to be a threesome?"

"It doesn't have to be like this. I'm not starving, God forbid. I don't lack women. I went from Rio de Janeiro to London first class on a ship, and if I tell you what I did during those two weeks at sea, you'll think I'm the biggest exaggerator in the world. Brother, you don't need too much talk to get them. I'll get straight to the point: So and so, here and there, I like you. I'm alone in the cabin. What does it say in the chapter? - 'Don't talk too much to the woman.' 27 Yes-yes, no-no. I don't know how it is with others, but with me it always comes out 'yes'. I don't know why. After all, I'm not at all beautiful. Everyone sees that I'm short, bald and chubby. Can you understand that?"

"Yes, I can," Yarma replied.

"What do you mean? Pity me?"

"All together."

"What's everything?"

"Your mouth. You can convince the whole world. Even a stone."

"Yes, yes. It's some kind of - what do you call it? - magnetism. If a magnet can attract a pin, why can't a man attract a piece of string? We just need to find the right wording. The three of us could conquer the whole world."

Max talked to Jarma over a cup of coffee and cheesecake at a café on Krochmalna Street 6. Then they sat and talked at Café Lores, and later at Café Samdenin on Theatre Square. Jarma told Kayla everything as they lay in bed at night. At first Kayla completely rejected the idea. No, and a hundred times no. She, Kayla, doesn't want anyone else anymore. She wants only one God and one Jarma. But Jarma argued against her:

"How long can we lie here, in Krochmalna number eight, and tremble for every penny? Enough! Even the pussies and pear compote are tired. Warsaw is a small town. Krochmalna again, and again Smocha, and again Stavka, and again Nizka. 28 It's getting out of my nose. America is a new world. Many beggars left Poland for America and became millionaires there. All we need to do is get the first few thousand. After that, everything goes smoothly, as if we were smeared with oil."

"What does he want us to do?"

"That the three of us will be like one hand. He will invest money in the business. He will dress you like a princess. He wants us to live in a hotel."

"Yarmal, he'll want something else. He ate me with his eyes."

"A partnership is a partnership."

"Oh, Yarmela, I'm scared!"

"He who is filled with terror should recite the Shema."

"Hold me tight! Hug me with both arms! Like this!"

Kayla clung to Yarma with such force that he feared she would break his ribs. She seemed to be trying to penetrate his guts with her sharp knees. She bit his lips, and for a moment she stopped breathing. For a while they both lay silent, listening intently to their arousing desire. Then Kayla said:

"Yarmal, maybe it's better to die?"

"Why is that?"

"I've always wanted to die for someone."

"There is a time for everything. The angel of death does not flee."

"I want to die young, not old."

"Women like you stay young forever."

"I would like you to kill me, and I will kiss your hands until my breath stops."

"Before you die, you have to live."

They lay quietly for a long time, restraining their passion, and fell asleep only towards dawn. At nine in the morning, Yerama woke up from a dream. For a moment he remembered the dream, and a minute later he forgot it. Only a vague memory of blood-drenched faces, terrible screams, spilled intestines and streams of blood remained. Was it a pogrom? A raid by bandits? A game of illusions by demons? Maybe everything together? Why are dreams forgotten so quickly? - Yerama wondered. He had slept only a few hours, but he woke up drowsy. He glanced at Kayla. She lay half-covered, and the nipples of her bare breasts stood out in a provocative crimson red. She laughed in her sleep, and one eye peeked out from a small crack of a raised eyelid. Oh my! This woman had been incarcerated with thousands of men and remained as fresh and blooming as a lily. How can one imagine such a thing? - Yerama wondered.

He went naked to the window. A strip of early morning sky stretched over the yard. Diagonal rays of sunlight illuminated the houses. Windows were opened. From time to time a girl appeared in the window and shook out bedclothes to air them out. A vendor passed by downstairs and called out: "Fresh bagels! Salted fish! Smoked fish!" Soon, jugglers, beggars, and street singers would arrive here to sing about the ship "Titanic" that sank in the mighty waters. The disabled would also come: blind people, amputees who had been wounded in the Russo-Japanese War. At one end of the yard lived an unauthorized butcher, who did his work in the basement for a pittance. This man had to bribe the police so that they wouldn't arrest him. There was also a Hasidic seminary here, and at this hour they were already praying there. A shofar was blown. What, it's already the month of Elul? - Yarama wondered. The summer passed by very quickly. Yarma heard "blow - fragments - trumpet." He remembered what they used to say in his hometown about blowing the shofar: Jews blow the shofar to scare the devil, so that he will think that the Messiah has come and will not be angry with the Israelites. Besides, the sound of the shofar calls the Jews to repent. Life passes quickly, like the summer that passed, and one must take stock. Maybe I will repent too? - Yarma mused. But he knew that it was just a game of thoughts. He was not ready to grow wigs and a beard, to marry some pious woman in a foreign wig. He did not want to start a family and have children to fill the house, as the pious did. Well, since there is no God, who cares about repentance? Kayla opened one eye.

"Yarmal, what time is it?"

"Go back to sleep. It's still early."

"Well."

And she went back and fell asleep.

on

Things developed quickly. Max introduced himself to Bertha Stein, or Bertha Mamzertha as she was called. In fact, he renewed an old friendship with her. Bertha was born on Krochmalena Street, but moved to Petase Street. Years ago she had run a brothel for wealthy clients but abandoned it, and instead set up a hotel with furnished rooms for lovemaking. Bertha tried her hand at everything: she was the landlady of a guesthouse, an agent who provided maids for wealthy homes, and a supplier of females to wealthy clients who needed discreet service. These clients had wives and families, and the secret of their sins had to be hidden. Bertha had two daughters by her first husband, and she sent them to study at a decent boarding school so that they would not know what their mother did. Her first husband died, and she divorced her second. For a long time she had a lover, Hezkal the coachman, but she dumped him and took some middleman instead. Hezkal got angry and stabbed her in the chest. For this crime he spent three years in prison, and then he went off somewhere, leaving behind a wife and five children. May God take care of their fate. Now Bertha had a new lover, Herz Kalashnik, who ran her hospitality business. He, Herz Kalashnik, had other occupations: he provided anyone interested with fake passports, false birth certificates, and other documents of that kind.

He, like Shmuel Shemant, knew how to stir the pot. He knew all the policemen, including the commander-in-chief, and was ready to do a favor for anyone who was willing to pay. Herz Kalashnik had a wife and a son who studied medicine. His eldest son joined the revolutionaries of 1905, and was shot in the stomach while participating in a demonstration near the city hall. Later, after spending two years in Pawiak, he repented and became one of the Hasidim of Uman - the dead Hasidim, as they called those who traveled to Uman, to the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, who had died several hundred years earlier. This son remained in Uman and studied in the Beit Midrash that the Breslov Hasidim had established at the site of their rabbi's burial.

Yarma the Thorn, Kayla the Red, Max the Lame, and Bertha of Mazerta met for lunch at a restaurant on Krochmalna Street, number two. This restaurant was well-known throughout the area, not just on Krochmalna Street. The food was kosher, but the regulars weren't so good: thieves, dealers in stolen

goods, prostitutes. Merchants who sold vegetables wholesale also ate there, and stall owners at the market in Janusz's yard. At night, music was played in the restaurant's lounge. The restaurant got its name from the first courses they served there: fried fat rinds, a fried leg, lung stew, chopped liver. All these delicacies were prepared on Krochmalna Street according to the guests' eating capacity, or according to the number of mugs of beer they drank. Moshe Baal-Bares stuffed half a goose here with twenty rolls and washed down the meal with fifteen mugs of beer. One, Label the Coachman, tried to imitate Moshe Baal-Kres, and suffered a stroke in the middle of his binge. There was a separate room here where they played zog or mule, dominoes, and cards. One, Haim the Rattlesnake, lost his wife here at the game of "twenty-one." When the winner came to Haim's house to pick up the wife, he discovered that the husband and wife had committed suicide. They inhaled gas and died.

Max had booked a separate room in the restaurant, which cost him fifteen rubles - not including the food and drinks. The walls of this room were covered with red wallpaper, and a carpet was spread on the stone floor. Bertha began to speak. She was already over fifty, and perhaps sixty, but she looked about forty. Her hair was completely black, and it was unclear whether it was natural or dyed. She had a pointed, curved nose like a bird's beak, and black eyes, large and round like an owl's. She always wore black dresses with long sleeves and a high, tightly buttoned collar to cover the scar left on her neck after Chezkal's murderous rage. Bertha liked to talk at length, with hatred interrupting the flow of her words.

First she started with general things. Today is not what it used to be. Times have changed. Not only secular Jews, but also those who pray in a synagogue, and even wealthy Hasidim, are no longer as devout as they used to be. The younger generation wants mainly to study and acquire an education. The father goes to the Rebbe, but sends his daughters to study at a gymnasium. The son studies in the synagogue and moves around on a page of Gemara, and the mother goes to hot springs in the summer. There she takes off her foreign wig, wears a hat, walks down the main street and speaks Polish or German. Daughters of Hasidim families fall in love with students, just young men, and even army officers - never mind trouble. Bertha boasted that if she revealed all the secrets she knew, how many respectable families would be destroyed. But she would never reveal someone else's secret. She would take everything with her to the grave, as they say.

The situation in Poland is such, Berta said, that the poor are getting poorer because prices are rising and the rich are getting richer. With money comes appetite, and it keeps growing. What's a man to do whose wife has been sick for several years and he can't get close to her? Some women get so fat that the fat pours out of them. It's simply disgusting to look at them. These women don't live for their husbands, but for their sons, daughters, grandchildren. There are also rich widows in Warsaw who don't want to marry again. These are women who are not young, ugly, but smart. They know that the men who crawl around them only want their money, not them. If you let a man into your home, he immediately becomes the owner of the house, and is able to squander all the property and destroy it. If such a woman can find a

man worthy of his name and travel with him abroad every year, to a place where no one knows them, she will do it willingly. It happens that after a while true love develops between such couples. Anyone who is interested knows that she, Bertha, can offer everything: from a furnished room for one night to a furnished apartment for a few months, or a few years. With her help, you can get a woman who will look after a seriously ill person day and night, and also a midwife who can help a girl get rid of her bloated belly. She provides maids who can both cook and go secretly with the landlord to the theater or the opera, while the woman is looking for a match for a girl in Carlsbad or Franzensbad. 29 She will also get you a mistress who will entertain you as much as you want, even for a lifetime. In short, for money you can get everything. But you have to know when, how, and with whom. Male and female are like key and lock. If they fit, then good. If not, it is bad and bitter.

Slowly, Bertha discovered the details of the matter. She wouldn't do this for strangers, but Max is an old friend. She has known him for more than twelve years, and in her opinion, true friendship is worth more than money. Even a friend of a friend counts in her eyes. Max is rich as a rock, without the evil eye. He is still young, in the prime of his life. He is a man of the world, a wise man who knows how things are done. She, Bertha, knows a man, not so young, about sixty or seventy years old. This man has a lot of money. His pockets are full and overflowing. Not thousands, but millions. He doesn't know himself how much his property is worth. He has a wicked wife, a real bitch, and four daughters. They all look like their mother. This man lives in Kiev. He is a first-class merchant - Jews like him are allowed to live throughout Russia because the "Moshav limit" 30 does not apply to them. Once he even had an interview with the Tsar. This stinking family lives in Kiev, but the father of the family runs all his businesses in Lodz and Warsaw. He also has businesses abroad. When he arrives in Warsaw, he is invited to the governor's palace. Berta has known him for many years, and he has revealed all his troubles to her.

This man has an apartment in her house. The apartment is luxuriously furnished, like an emperor's. Berta receives the rent in the mail, whether he comes to Warsaw or not. For many years he had a mistress here, Sofya Mikhailovna. He adored her, and she adored him. He, Sergei Davidovich, is far from handsome. But a man doesn't have to be handsome. It's enough that he isn't ugly like a monkey. A man has to be smart and kind-hearted, who knows how to love a woman and be generous to her. Sergei Davidovich has all these virtues, and a little more. He would have continued to live with Sofya Mikhailovna, who was twenty years younger than him, maybe more. Sofya was as beautiful as a picture. She knew Russian, Polish, Yiddish. She knew everything that was necessary and possible to know. But suddenly she caught a cold, got a runny nose and a high fever. She lay in bed, and within a week she passed away. Sergei Davidovich was in Carlsbad when it happened. He had to drink medicinal water because of the liver disease he was suffering from. It took some time before Sophia allowed her, Bertha, to telegraph Sergei Davidovich to inform him that she was sick. By the time he arrived in Warsaw, she was already lying in the morgue of the Jewish hospital on Czysta Street.

"My dear friends, I don't want to chatter endlessly," said Bertha, "but this man is seized with black bile. Worse. He simply broke down. Completely shattered. It's been two years since it happened. I tried to comfort him and find someone for him to help him get back to himself, because you have to forget what the earth covers. But there's no one who can please him and satisfy his needs. No one is as beautiful, as smart, as tasteful as Sophia. To tell the truth, I was afraid he would end his life. He left a huge fortune in his will for Sophia Mikhailovna, but she left no heirs, except for her husband - a scoundrel who made her life miserable and was not willing to give her a divorce. It would be a terrible crime if this money fell into the hands of this vile character. It would also be an injustice if the money went to his wife, that scum with her daughters. Last week, when Max seemed to suddenly fall from the sky after so many years and told me about the plans "It suddenly occurred to me that maybe Kayla could perform the miracle and get the poor old man back on his feet. After all, in such matters you never know what will happen."

Everyone was silent for a long time. Kayla's face turned unusually red. It was the same redness that sometimes appears on the face after drinking too much Yish, or during an epileptic seizure. Her red hair looked pale compared to the blush that had come over her face. Her cheeks, forehead, neck - from the edge of the neckline of her dress to the roots of her hair - seemed to be dipped in blood. Yerma shuddered and turned pale. The limp Max opened his mouth and seemed to have forgotten to close it. Bertha placed her hand on the table.

"You, girl, aren't so bad if you can still blush like that."

"I'm a human, not an animal," Kayla choked and answered in a choked voice.

Her face was drenched in sweat. It seemed as if an invisible hand had poured a pitcher full of water on her. Large drops ran down her face in a stream. Yarma asked:

"Kayla, what happened to you?"

"Nothing, nothing," Kayla muttered.

third

Everything went like in the novels that Yarma had read in the newspapers. Yarma went down to the sausage shop in the morning and called Berta from there, and she told him that Sergei Davidovich was now in Warsaw and was waiting for Kayla. Would she be willing to take a carriage and go to him right away? "What's a carriage?" Yarma asked. "The station isn't far. Only two steps." Berta scolded him: "Let her do what I tell you. The matchmaking shouldn't be ruined because of forty pennies." Yarma returned home and told Kayla that Sergei Davidovich was waiting for her, and she must take a carriage and go to him right away. Kayla heard and began to tremble and stammer, as if she were an innocent virgin and not a whore who had rolled in countless piles of garbage. She demanded - no less - that Yarma ride with her in the carriage and wait for her on a bench in the square in front of the Iron Gate. Yarma tried to calm her down:

"Kayla, stop shaking with fear. The old man hasn't been a man for a long time. It won't get far. At most, kiss. We've already agreed on everything."

“What will you do in the meantime?” Kayla asked.

"I have an interview with the Queen of Sheba."

"Did Bertha scratch something for you too?"

"Yes, Kailshi. A fifty-year-old widow. Old Bella."

"Yarmal, remember my words: this Max is our angel of death!"

"Well, the Angel of Death is for people, not dogs," said Yarma. "You have to play the game before you die. I only want one thing from you: the whole truth."

"Yarmela, I swore to you about my mother's arrangement that I would not deny or hide anything from you."

"That's all."

"What should I wear? The red jacket or the yellow one?"

"You're the yellow one. Hurry up. Don't waste time."

Yerma also dressed up. He had obtained a shirt with gold dots and a matching tie somewhere. He was also apparently nervous, because he sucked on his cigarette in hasty puffs. After a while they both left the house gate.

A feather plucker from the kosher butcher shop pushed a flock of turkeys in. He skillfully swung a long stick to keep the birds from running away. Kayla commented:

"The butcher, huh?"

"Yes, Kaelshi," replied Yarma. "Turkeys must be slaughtered. That is God's will."

Yarma stopped an empty carriage passing by and helped Kayla climb in and sit down. All the empty and exhausted people standing in the square looked curiously at the red Kayla riding in her carriage without any packages or bundles. Yarma climbed in too, but he did not sit in the carriage but stood on the step. When they reached the end of Gniewa Street, he said that the widow lived at 31 Grzebowska Street and got out of the carriage with a light jump backwards. The carriage tilted to the left, and Kayla remembered the day she had first gone with tall Zainwol to Pesja Stupak's brothel. She was a frightened child then, barely fifteen, and Zainwol had to push her from time to time. In the following years she became so experienced and cunning that she surpassed all the other prostitutes in her impudent speech, her peppery jokes and the curses she hurled at those who offended her. Men fought for the right to be with her, and paid her double and triple. But she, with all her impudence and aggression, remained shy. How can one understand this? - God only knows. During the two and a half years she was with Yarma, she seemed to have forgotten her previous behavior. She and Yarma spoke only of their love. She wanted to give birth. To have a child with Yarma. But not long ago, blind Icha dragged her into the mud, and now - lame Max, may the devil take him.

The day was bright, sunny. Rosh Hashanah was approaching. The sky was already writing who would live and who would die. Maybe this was my last Rosh Hashanah, Kayla mused. God in heaven, at least let the old man have a bottle of Yish, she begged in her heart. In truth, all those years she had only managed to cope with the shame and disgrace of her despicable life with the help of drink. When she got drunk, she became a different person, not the same Kayla. When Yishma entered her life, she was in a state of addiction to the liquor. She couldn't live a moment without Yishma. In the morning, before she tasted anything, she poured half a glass of alcohol down her throat. Dr. Krumerman—the doctor she went to every month to check on her and certify that she was free of any lesions or blood worms—warned her that she might burn her intestines. Yerma weaned her off the bitter drop, and he did so both harshly and gently. Now Kayla felt she had to drink. If she didn't drink something, she wouldn't be able to say a word to that rich Jew, Sergei Davidovich. Father in heaven, if only he wouldn't start speaking Russian to me! Kayla begged in her heart. Kayla had never learned the languages of the Gentiles, although among her clients were quite a few Polish scoundrels and Russian soldiers. At most, she knew a few simple words and common curses.

The carriage stopped. At the gate, Bertha was waiting for her with her luggage and herself. Bertha looked Kayla up and down. Kayla was so confused that she forgot to give the coachman the silver coin she had been clutching in her clenched fist during the ride. Bertha had to remind her. At the gate, Bertha warned her:

"Kayla, I want to tell you something before we go up. First, you should know that this man is not one of your scoundrels, the dogs you know. Sergei Davidovich is a gentle man, a first-rate merchant. He is a man of the world, going in and out of the greatest houses. You have to talk to him gently. Through the silk handkerchief, as they say. You have to listen to him politely. Don't insist or argue."

“Does he speak Russian?” Kayla asked in a hoarse voice. Her throat was completely dry.

"He speaks Russian, he speaks Yiddish, Polish, German. Whatever you want to hear and remember. You can talk to him in Yiddish. You don't forget your mother tongue. Secondly, you should know that he doesn't hear well. He's not deaf. But when a person gets old, he's not what he used to be. Sofya Mikhailovna knew how to talk to him. Not too quietly, and not too loudly. If you shout, he gets angry and confused. Thirdly, he has problems with his eyes. Glaucoma. That's what they call it. He's not blind, but sometimes he can't see. He wears glasses, but that doesn't always help. I advise you not to talk to him about worldly matters, the kind that are written about in the newspapers, because I understand that you don't know much. But be gentle with him. Listen to him. He likes to talk, to tell all sorts of things. He'll probably talk to you about Sofya Mikhailovna. He talks about her all the time. Don't interrupt him. Show

him that you have feelings for him, as they say. Do you understand me?"

"yes."

"If he gives you a kiss or caresses you, give yourself to him. I don't believe he'll do it the first time. But a man is a man, even if he's lying on his deathbed. Don't tell him who and what you are. Tell him you're a seamstress who's just come from the provinces. Indeed, you really did come from there."

"Yes, yes."

"If a miracle happens from heaven and he demands that you get into bed with him, pretend to be ashamed, because you're not used to such things. But don't be too persistent, and don't argue with him. He has no patience, and he doesn't have the strength for much talking either. Sophia Mikhailovna, may she rest in peace and pray for you in heaven, told me that he still has great strength, even though he's a sickly old man. But that was two years ago. Since Sophia passed away, he hasn't been the same person. He'll probably ask you what your name is. Kayla isn't a pretty name. You know yourself that 'Kayla' sounds like 'tool.' You know, chamber pot... I'll never be able to understand why parents give their daughters such strange names: Kayla, Yente, Jahneh, Sprinze, Gele, Greene, 32 Pesya. These are Names from hundreds of years ago. Tell him your name is Sonya. In Russia, every second girl is called Sonya. What was your father's name?"

"My father?" Sonya answered with a question.

"Yes, your father. If you had a father, he probably had a name."

"yes."

"So what was his name?"

Strange. But in all her excitement, Kayla forgot her father's name. Bertha waited a moment.

"What was his name? And maybe he's still alive?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe dead, huh? So what was his name?"

"I forgot."

"Did you forget?! I can't believe it! It's worth having children - - -"

"I'm so confused, that - - -"

"What was your grandfather's name?"

"One grandfather was named Zalman."

"Zalman is good. Tell him your father's name was Zalman. He'll call you Sonya Zalmanovna. Among Russians, even among Jews in Russia, everyone is called by their father's name. That's the custom there."

"I remembered my father's name," Kayla suddenly woke up.

"What was his name?"

"Blessed is the dove."

"Baruch-Yona sounds heavy in Russian. Let it be Zalman. The old man won't check your passport. You probably have a yellow card, 33 huh?"

"Yes. Yellow."

"If you want to go to Buenos Aires any time soon, the yellow passport won't be good. They won't let you board a ship with that kind of passport. We'll make you another passport. But we'll take care of that when we need to. In the meantime, there's still time. Come on."

Berta took Kayla in her arm. Kayla's arm trembled. Berta stopped. "Don't tremble, girl. You're fluttering like a hen in a barn. Sergei Davidovich is a gentle man. He won't do you any harm. Only good. Sergei Davidovich was in love with me all these years. When the tragedy with Sophia happened and I gave him the bitter news and went with him to the hospital so he could see her in the morgue, he clung to me as if I were his daughter. She wasn't his wife, but he sat on her for seven days. Poor Jews came to do minyan, and he gave them charity money and demanded that they pray with him. He said Kaddish as if Sophia were his wife. He sat on a little stool and looked through a book. I came to him to comfort the mourners, as they say, and one evening he said to me: 'My dear Berta, only you knew how to comfort me in my grief.' That evening he told me that he was in love with me before he met Sofia Mikhailovna. He only called Sofia because he couldn't reach me. I told him: 'Sergey Davidovich, I love you too. But I love you as a person, as if you were my father or brother. But my heart belongs to the land of Kalashnikov.' Sergei understood me. Since then he has never mentioned it."

D

Bertha opened a door that led to a large apartment with two windows covered with heavy curtains and a carpet spread on the floor. Oh, what a living room! - thought Kayla. On the walls hung various landscape paintings and portraits. Here stood a large chest of drawers, and next to it - upholstered chairs, a sofa, a sideboard with glass doors. The sun was shining outside, but here the gloom of twilight reigned. In one of the corners, on an armchair with red tassels, sat a small man, tiny as a dwarf. His bald head, decorated with a white beard, stuck out from his broad shoulders, and it seemed as if he had no neck. He was wearing a flowered robe, and his short legs, shod in slippers, rested on a velvet-upholstered footstool. The end of a cigar was stuck in his mouth, and half a golden apple lay next to him on a small serving table. What a monster! - a thought flashed through Kayla's mind.

Bertha grabbed Kayla's arm - half leading her, half dragging her. She approached the old man and raised her voice: "Sergey Davidovich, here's the girl. She's a little shy, but she'll stop being shy soon." Sergei Davidovich tilted his ear and with a trembling hand placed the end of his cigar in the ashtray that stood next to the orange. His other hand fumbled in his robe pocket and took out a pair of gold-framed glasses. Now he grabbed the black string that hung from the glasses and brought them closer to his eyes. Through the thick lenses, his eyes stood out like those of a calf. He said a few words in Russian, and immediately switched to speaking Yiddish.

"Well, well, sit down, sit down. 34 I'm a little unwell. I have a cold, a runny nose. But it's not bad, it's not bad. Berta Mosievna, where did you get her? A pretty girl. Beautiful," he added in Russian: "Still young. Young... how old, eh? I made refreshments somewhere. But... what a pity. The maid went down and went somewhere. Maybe she went shopping. The phone rang, and I thought... when I went up, no one answered..."

"What? If anyone needs you, they'll ring again. Sonya Zalmanovna," Berta turned to Kayla, explaining to the old man: "The girl's name is Sonya. Sonya," Berta repeated to Kayla, "if you want anything, or if Mr. Sergei Davidovich asks for anything, there's a kitchen here full of goodies: a gas stove, a kettle, tea, sugar, lemon, cookies. I've sent Zushka the maid to buy medicine. She'll also go to the post office to buy stamps at the same time. Does your honor want tea?" she asked the old man.

"Tea? No."

"There's water in the kettle. You just need to turn on the gas. I'll go to my apartment and leave you alone. My door is close. If you need to," Bertha turned to Kayla, "you can knock on the door and call me. Here, on the door on the left. Don't ring the bell. Just knock. The toilet is here, by the kitchen. Don't forget to flush the water."

"Thank you very much."

"Don't be so scared. No one will eat you here!" Bertha scolded her in a whisper. She winked at Kayla before leaving. As soon as Bertha had left, Sergei Davidovich called out: "Come, girl. Come closer, come closer. Make yourself comfortable. Like at home. I'm not very well, but I'm feeling better now. I feel much better. What did you say your name was?"

Kayla wanted to answer, but she couldn't remember what name Bertha had given her just a few minutes ago. She had never been in a luxurious apartment, reeking of such wealth. Every moment, another object she hadn't noticed before would flash before her eyes. On a small table stood a telephone, and next to it a bottle of wine or liqueur. Behind the glass pane of the sideboard peeked a box made of pure silver. Next to it stood a silver perfume tower, decorated with Hebrew letters. There were also leather-bound books with gold decorations and letters. He must be a lawyer, Kayla thought.

He spoke to her in Yiddish, but she didn't understand his language for some reason. What was that, a litvak 35 or something? Years ago, when she was in the brothel on Tamke Street, 36 an officer hired her for a whole night and took her to him. She was completely drunk that night, and she didn't care what happened to her. She only remembers marble steps, and a rude man who spoke to her in Russian, placed a glass of wine on her head and aimed his gun at it, trying to shoot it. He also ordered her to undress completely and take a bath with him. The next morning, early, he took her back to Tamka Street. Later, Kayla learned that her aunt had charged him a fortune - twenty-five rubles! - for that night. But here everything was different. The old man did not abuse her or humiliate her, but addressed her as an equal. He invited her to have sex, but something stopped her and she did not dare to sit on the wicker straw seat of the polished chair. She could hardly hold back from bursting into tears. A feeling of shame, the likes of which she had never felt, seized her. She wanted to snatch the bottle of drink and empty it down her throat to cheer herself up and gain some courage. But she could not do that either. One wish filled her heart: to run away. From here. But what will Bertha say about it? What will lame Max think of her? And Yarma? What will this learned man say?

The phone rang, and Sergei Davidovich slowly got up and picked up the receiver. He spoke in Russian, and from time to time he uttered a word in Yiddish. Kayla was amazed: so sick, and yet - smart and learned! Her arrogance faded like a magic wand. Miraculously, her debauched debauchery and unbridled mischief disappeared, and she returned to being a helpless child, a soft orphan without a protector, lost in the big city. In front of her stood an old man who was having difficulty breathing, but - a man of the great world, smart, and knowledgeable. The old man spoke and smiled from time to time. Maybe he was talking about me and laughing at me, Kayla thought. Finally the old man ended the conversation, said goodbye in Russian, and put the telephone receiver back in its place. He did not return to the armchair, but turned and went to the toilet behind the kitchen. It was a long time before Kayla heard him flush the toilet. While the old man was in the bathroom, Kayla managed to pull the cork out of the neck of the bottle and take a decent sip. It was some kind of sweet "YES!" She licked her lips, and after a moment took another sip. "After all, I'm lost anyway," she apologized to herself. Within a minute she felt herself recovering, starting to get stronger, and even trusting herself. What am I so afraid of? It can't get any worse than the situation I've reached, she consoled herself. The two big sips from the bottle restored her strength. She even remembered that her name was Sonya, and that her father's name was not Baruch-

Yona but Zalman - the same as her grandfather's. Sergei Davidovich appeared in the kitchen doorway, and Kayla ran to meet him, grabbed his arm, and helped him back to the armchair. While he groaned, as if carrying a heavy, oppressive burden.

"Thank you," he said in Russian and continued in Yiddish. "What did you say your name was?"

"Sonia. My father's name was Zalman."

"Zalman, huh? Sonya Zalmanovna, young people think that youth is preserved forever. But when old age takes hold of a person, he begins to lose strength. Every day we treat you with a different patient. Sit down, sit down. Here, like this. A chair was made for sitting on. I had an important friend in my life. Sofia was her name. Sofia Mikhailovna. I was sure that I would go to my death long before her, because I am so many years older than her. But fate decreed otherwise. She was a friend of Berta Mosievna. These two women supported me and helped me to continue my life. I am a victim of a bad marriage. One mistake, and after the wrong step everything is lost forever. Sofia was healthy when I went, and when I returned she was already dead. Well, that's how it is. Maybe you would like something to drink? I have a sweet liqueur here. A women's drink. I am not allowed to drink alcohol. My intestines, liver, bladder. The doctor also "I'm forbidden to smoke. But I allow myself to smoke two cigars a day. What harm can it do? The body is like clothing. Clothing is strong, durable, but suddenly it starts to tear everywhere. You sew up one tear, and immediately three new tears appear. Pour yourself a drink. Here, there's a bottle and a glass here."

Kayla saw the glass for the first time, and poured herself a full glass. A glass similar to this one had been used by her grandfather at Kiddush. She knew that something was said before drinking, a blessing written in the siddur, but she had forgotten the blessing. Intense love for the old man washed over her. He talked to her, poured his heart out to her, and honored her with a glass of drink. Kayla feared that there was not enough drink left in the bottle, and she would not be able to fill the glass. But she poured to the brim, and the bottle did not empty. Now she raised the glass, said in Polish, "To health!", and immediately drained it in one gulp. For a moment she was about to slam the glass against the wall, as Russian soldiers and officers do when they drink. But after a slight hesitation, she stopped herself and placed it on the table. "To health!", the old man answered her in Polish, and then added, "Cheers!". Oh! That was the word! The word was on the tip of her tongue, but she couldn't say it: "Cheers!" At that moment, Kayla did something that surprised her and caused her great embarrassment.

She ran to Sergei Davidovich, grabbed his face with both hands, and began to kiss his shaved bald head.

One kiss, another kiss, many kisses, very quickly. She kissed him with some kind of hasty, greedy lust, as if the old man would forbid her to continue. It seemed to her that the old man's face was heating up at the touch of her hands, or perhaps the warmth of her hands was radiating to him. She finished with the scalp and began to kiss his forehead, nose, mouth, white beard. The old man did not kiss her back. He only fluttered and twitched, as if he were trying to move his lips to say something, and she stopped them with her lips. All this lasted no more than a short moment. She broke away from him, trembling all over, and stepped back. Sergei Davidovich's glasses fell and remained hanging on the black lace. His face was covered with a mixture of red and white spots. His beard was unkempt and crooked. Sergei Davidovich looked at her curiously from behind his white eyebrows, and it seemed that his breath was caught. He muttered in a choked voice: "Well, like that. How did I get this?" Kayla wanted to answer, but again she was at a loss for words. She breathed heavily and blurted out: "Because you are a human being," and was left stunned by her own words.

the

Yarma wasn't lying when he told Kayla that Berta had pimped out a widow for him. This widow lived on Grzebowska Street, opposite the Jewish community council building. Berta showed Yarma a photograph of the woman: a clumsy nose and a double chin. Her complexion looked rough and wrinkled. Yarma had already heard of this woman. Her husband, Netele Keele, had gotten rich by mutilating young men who had received draft orders: he mutilated them, so that they were disqualified for military service because of the hernia in their groin. Netele breathed his last in Pawiak prison, after a recruit settled a score with him. He left his wife a large fortune. After his death, Bronia married twice, and divorced both times. She secretly told Berta that she didn't want to marry again. It was enough that she had stood under the canopy three times. Bronya was looking for a lover, and told Berta openly: "No one will fall in love with me because of my nose as thick as a potato and my stuffed snout." That's why she was willing to pay for love. To buy love, like men do.

Lame Max paid a visit to Bronya, and then told Bertha that he would not touch this woman, even if they offered him a mountain of gold. Bronya also found no use in Max. Besides being lame, he was also too small. So short and thin! Bertha showed Bronya a photograph of Jarma, and after taking one look at it, she exclaimed: "Oh! That's the man for me!"

Yarma responded to the pleas and persuasions. If Kayla is having an affair with Sergei Davidovich, why should he - Yarma - stay at home and sit like some miserable bastard? He needed some kind of change, he said, after almost three years with only one female. Max spoke to his heart and encouraged him by claiming that loyalty between a man and a woman was no more worth than an eggshell. Max had read

somewhere that all people - both men and women - secretly want to be betrayed. But it wasn't that simple. On the way to the widow's house, Yarma felt the strength of Kayla's unclean power. A terrible fear fell upon him. He feared that his male power would disappear when he met Bronya. Somehow he had forgotten how to approach females. Perhaps he had lost the charm he once had? Yarma preferred to walk, rather than travel by carriage. He walked slowly, stopping every few steps. On one of the streets he stood by the display windows of women's hat shops. The weather was still summer, but here they were already displaying felt hats and other types of thick cloth, velvet, and even fur hats for winter. One shop specialized in hats for mourning women: dark hats with black silk veils. Here and there Yarma's eye caught the sight of a young milliner behind the glass panes. The world was crawling and buzzing with young girls who filled the streets, and he was walking towards some monster - an old hag, rough and pitted like a grater. I will close my eyes and imagine that it is Kayla, he decided. If he wants lovers there, he must not do anything wrong. He must pretend, act like an actor. Years ago he knew how to do that, but now he had grown weary of the old tricks. Now he envied Kayla. A female can pretend, fake it. She can sleep with a hundred men, and remain as cold as ice.

Bronya lived in a magnificent house. Yarma climbed the marble stairs that led to her apartment. He tried to summon his old confidence and cheerfulness, but he knew that his situation was bad and bitter. Kayla was right, Yarma thought. Max was indeed their angel of death. A black demon had brought him here to reduce everything to dust and ashes, to slather them with slime, and then to eliminate them. Yarma clearly felt how two types were struggling inside his soul. One argued: "What's the point of all this confusion and confusion? It's better to be content with a piece of dry bread and not to deal with such a vile scoundrel. Go to where Kayla is now, take her home, and don't let Max appear before your eyes. He wants to drag you into the slime, but you must be careful not to fall into his net." The other, the evil instinct, answered with a counter-question: "So what will you do? Pluck feathers in a slaughterhouse? Be a porter carrying baskets of coal to houses? Sell apples in the market?" In recent years, Yarma had lost his talent for dubious business. He had become refined, soft-hearted. Something split inside him, as if two rival people were pushing him this way and that. One demanded to go home, but the other strode to the door of Bronya's house. Yarma cleared his throat, gathered his courage, and rang the bell. Bronya opened the door. She was wearing a robe and slippers, but she was made up and disheveled. It seemed that she had also been to a hairdresser who had her hair done, and perhaps dyed her hair. Bronya looked him up and down, hesitated for a moment, and then invited him in.

"Yarma, huh? Come in." She led him through a long corridor into a room covered in crimson-red wallpaper and a carpet of the same shade. A large gramophone with a huge amplifier stood on a dresser. On the wall hung a portrait of Natella Kile: round face and a bushy beard. Natella's eyes smiled, as if they were still alive. Yarma imagined that those eyes were saying: Well, this is what happens to a man when he lies four cubits deep in the ground... A large doll in a silk dress with lace was sitting among the cushions on the sofa. On the table stood bottles of liquor, Yishun, and liqueur, and next to them - a serving dish full of cookies. Heavy curtains hung on the windows, and a gas lamp lit the room, even

though it was still noon. Bronya took the doll off the sofa and motioned for Yarma to take her place. She herself sat down on an armchair upholstered in red cloth with red tassels, smiled with a mouth full of false teeth, and asked in a manly voice:

"Berta sent you, huh?"

"Yes, Bertha."

"I know her. I know her like an old card. My husband, who will be a good counselor for us, and the Kalashnikov were good friends. Like two brothers. He came here often. We would play cards, especially 'Sixty-Six.' When the Kalashnikov did something stupid and fell into the hands of the Gentiles, Natalya would let him go. Now the Kalashnikov is playing her a great wise man, a respectable person, and Bertha is making herself an important lady. But he won't marry her. He can't. He has a wife."

"Yes, I know."

"They say he has another one too," Bronya added.

"Isn't Bertha enough for him?"

"That's what men are like. They have big eyes. But when it comes to serious matters, they have no value. They are worthless."

"Well..."

"Let's drink to life. What do you want, Yish or liqueur?"

"May it be YHWH."

Bronya poured two glasses. Yarma noticed that her hand was as big as a man's. He swallowed the drink quickly. The Yish scratched his throat and burned his insides.

"Another drink?"

"So be it."

"Don't get drunk. When a man drinks, he immediately wants to sleep."

"Not alone," Yarama hurried to answer, not sure of his own words.

"Does Kayla know you're here? Bertha told me all about you."

"I am not a rabbi and Kayla is not a rabbi." Yarma was surprised by the words that came out of his mouth.

"I like everything to be quiet. Shh - shh. I don't want them to come to me with high expectations."

"I have no expectations."

"Take something to chew with your drink."

Yarma turned the second glass into his mouth and quickly took a bite of a cookie. He wanted to be a comrade, to say something witty, but he didn't know what. Kayla always became cheerful and happy when she took a sip of the bitter drop. But he, Yarma, was sinking into a bitter mood. Bronya looked at him from the side, with a sour look, full of contempt. She looked exactly like a pig, it suddenly occurred to him. He felt no desire to approach this clumsy, fat creature. I wasn't allowed to come here! He was ashamed. Not only of Bronya, but also of what she would tell Bertha later, and Bertha would pass

everything on to Max. A great fear fell upon him, a fear that from now on he would be helpless with Kayla too. Kayla often told him about the types who would come to the brothel, who couldn't, or couldn't, finish, and who still demanded the ten pennies they had paid in advance back. She also told of those who demanded to be slapped, of others who asked to be spat on, to have their hair pulled out, to be whipped. Yerma sat still and cast a sharp glance at the bottle. He hesitated. Should he have another sip or not? No, he decided vigorously. It would help like cupping for the dead. Now he asked:

"Where is the toilet?"

"Here, in the hallway."

Yarma went out into the hallway, glanced at the door, opened it quietly, and started running down the stairs. He ran like a frightened child, skipping two steps at a time. Shame and humiliation ran with him. Well, I'm done, something inside him cried out. He quickly left the gate and started running towards Granitshne Street. His legs were strangely light. As he ran, he decided that he would have no more business with Max. He would send him to all the demons and ghosts, and if Max did not agree to let go of him, he would stab him with a knife. Yarma now wanted to rescue Kayla from the filth as well. I would run away with her to America, and start leading a decent life. A verse he had learned in the room came back to his memory: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there." 37 But who said this? Moses our Lord, Jacob our Father? Suddenly a strong longing for Kayla arose in him. He must get her. Immediately and now! Shortly after that he returned to Berta's street and entered her gate. Only that I would not meet Berta on the stairs, he asked God, or whoever had the power to create such chance encounters. Well, but where does Sergei Davidovich live? Yerma wanted to break down the door to his apartment and burst in. If he found Kayla with the old man in bed, he would strangle them both. This is love. True love. You can't abandon a woman you love so much and give her to just anyone, not even for a million rubles.

A girl with a triangular face, covered with freckles, came down from the upper floor. She was wearing a short dress and her feet were in worn-out slippers. Yerma wanted to ask her where the old man lived, but in an instant he forgot his name.

"Where does an old man live here who speaks Russian? A sick old man. From Russia."

"Huh? I don't know."

"Don't you live here?"

"I'm a servant here. I don't know anything."

"A rich man."

"Ask someone else."

He, Yarma, felt like grabbing that idiot and dragging her by the hair. But he held back. The girl would start screaming. They could still carry him to the unicorn. So he moved aside and let her pass. But he did it so that she would have to rub against him. I'm drunk, drunk to death, Yarma apologized to himself.

and

Lame Max, or Leon Gempner as he was listed on his new passport, sat in his room at the Krakowski Hotel and read the newspaper in Yiddish. His body was always hot, and he didn't know why. He asked doctors, but no one could explain the reason to him. In the summer he used to sleep naked, without a cover. Not even a thin sheet. In the winter he left the window open, both day and night. His lame leg always hurt, and the moment he was left alone he would take off his shoes and go barefoot. Now he sat with the newspaper, smoked a cigarette and read. Every few lines he stopped and began talking to himself, throwing out words as if they were legumes. Max didn't know if this was a trait of his from childhood, or a habit he had acquired in the prisons he had been in - in Warsaw, in Bradum, in Buenos Aires. He not only talked to himself but also winked, pursed his lips, stretched them with a smile and sometimes opened and closed them forcefully, like a dog catching a fly in the air. Anyway, Max continued reading and came to a passage in the novel that told how Zbigniew Kaczynski - the vile schemer, the instigator and the criminal - placed a ladder at the foot of the window in the palace of Count Leopold Korabitch, and kidnapped Lady Helena. Max chuckled in a thin voice. Nonsense, nonsense, there was no such thing and it has never been created. Such a thing is as possible as if suddenly, like thunder on a clear day, Passover falls in the middle of Elul. These chatty scribes invent nonsense. They throw words into the air, exaggerate and exaggerate, as if there were a fair in the sky. "Nonsense for a penny, the head of a mosquito," he concluded to himself.

Sometimes Max couldn't believe that he had really studied the Gemara with Tosafot in his youth at Piasek's Beit Midrash, and had heard a lesson from the rabbi. But he still remembered proverbs and words of wisdom from the Gemara and the books of Hasidic Jews. How long had it been since he had walked away from all of that? No more than fifteen years. To him, it seemed like an eternity. During those fifteen years, he had gone through hundreds of incarnations, not one. If he had tried to write down everything that had happened in his life, no one would have believed his stories. Those idiots who read these fabrications in the newspaper and eagerly swallow these eggshells as if they were the Torah of Moses from Sinai would have treated him like a liar. Is it possible to tell all the stories of his life? He has a brother, a sister, and even children that his eyes have never seen. He abandoned many women and left them agunot - in Poland, Argentina, Canada. He has reached remote lands - Mexico, Bolivia, Uruguay, Trinidad. He managed to gamble in casinos in various cities - Monte Carlo, Mar del Plata. Max spoke many languages. In addition to Yiddish, Polish and Russian, he also knew German, Spanish, Portuguese, English. Once, when he was traveling by train from Kiev to Odessa, a general's wife took him into her private compartment in first class and devoted herself to him. On the ship sailing from London to Brazil, he had affairs with several women: a Frenchwoman, a German, an Italian, and also a black female, whose name he no longer remembered and whose country she came from. Strangely, but in addition to his amazing achievements with women, Max was more attracted to men, and always found himself a partner in the prisons where he served time. That Saturday evening, at the Jewish theater, Max pretended to have met Yarma by chance. In truth, he had missed him all these years, and now he had come especially to look for him. Te-te-te, I really am a special person! What is going on there, in my crazy head? Even God, if he sleeps at all, cannot know.

Max finished smoking one cigarette, and immediately rubbed a match on the sole of his shoe and lit a second one. He had a golden gun and three passports: one in his suitcase, and two in the breast pockets of his suit. He also had a bag full of medicine for various ailments: pills for headaches, for stomachaches or constipation, for heartburn, and in addition to that - a whole collection of sleeping pills. About five years ago, a doctor who claimed that he was dangerously ill scared him, and prescribed him a series of treatments: electric shocks, medicinal baths, massage with alcohol. The doctor also warned Max that he might collapse at any moment if he didn't calm down. Therefore, he demanded that he quit smoking, not mess with women too much, and lead a quiet and peaceful lifestyle.

Max laughed. A peaceful life! Take yourself in hand! How can he be calm if his head works like a machine twenty-four hours a day? When he does manage to fall asleep, he is attacked by indescribable nightmares. He flies like an eagle, is shaken and rolled in the grave. He is thrown with a slingshot. Goblins throw him into a desolate desert, full of scorpions and snakes. He is thrown into hell, and there he is laid on beds of nails and hot coals. Then come mounds of scorching snow, and after them - pits and earthen burrows. He is shot, hanged, whipped on his back, run across a line of flames, between two rows of Cossacks who beat him with their rifle butts, stab him with swords and bayonets. Dark, terrifying figures appear before him: half man, half beast; both male and female. They all have beards and pigtails,

dangling penises and sagging breasts; a long snout sticks out in front of them, and a pig's tail curls behind them. Their eyes are a blazing fire, and they shout at him in shrill voices, barking like dogs, roaring like lions, and snoring like wild boars. He is immersed in a filthy mess of garbage, slime, and sewage. He hears wailing sounds, crazy talk, and words that cannot be understood or remembered, not even for a moment. The doctor called it nervousness. But what is nervousness?

When he was awake, he was as stormy and emotional as when he was asleep. He always felt the need to plan, to imagine, to build towers blooming in the air. He was both sane and crazy; both merciful and a savage murderer. He had religious faith, but he was also mostly a pagan and believed in superstitions. He was a bold adventurer and a coward. He threw money everywhere, and at the same time calculated every penny. He gambled on his freedom and often risked himself without calculation. However, he was afraid of the evil eye, worried that someone would come across him with an empty vessel, and was wary of black cats. Among his belongings were special ivory, pieces of amber, amulets. At every opportunity, he would go to fortune tellers, card readers, and astrologers who examined his personal horoscope. He turned to soothsayers who called upon the dead, magicians who showed figures in a black mirror, and soothsayers who brought requests for peace from the dead. In recent days, he had discovered an ad in a Yiddish newspaper in Warsaw, which advertised a gymnasium that helped people locate relatives, find missing husbands and wives, and discover lost objects. This young man gave various remedies and remedies for impotence, arthritis, muscle pain, and chronic hiccups. He helped his patients with various treatment methods: magnetism, hypnosis, sleight of hand, sleight of hand. Just a swindler, a wretched swindler, Max told himself, but he cut out the ad with scissors and put it aside anyway. Who knows? It could be that this young man was endowed with the hidden ability to perform miracles. If there were magicians in the past, why wouldn't there be any now?

Max opened a drawer and took out an album. This album had photographs of all the females and all the males he had ever had an affair with. There were also love letters, engagement conditions, and addresses. In fact, he was not allowed to carry with him evidence that could incriminate him. But these were the only mementos he had left from the adventures that had stirred his life. He counted the number of his victims for the thousandth time, studied their faces, talked to them. Max loved women, and also detested them. They had all disappointed him. In his sleep, he always dreamed of men. He exploited his lust for men to achieve satisfaction with females. That is why he preferred women with flat chests, and gave them male names. He also demanded that they hide the signs of their sexuality. Many times he convinced them to give themselves to other men.

The hotel valet knocked on Max's room door and announced that he was being called to the telephone. Max jumped up, threw on a dressing gown and limped to the telephone in the hallway. He picked up the receiver and heard Bertha's voice. She informed him that the red Kayla was with Sergei Davidovich, and Yarma went to Bronya, the shorn widow. Max was immediately enthusiastic, completely confident in

himself.

"Bertushu, it's going! The matter is progressing!"

"You, Max, can work wonders. Even push a wall against the wall opposite."

"Me?! It's all you. The two of us could have turned worlds upside down, if you hadn't tied yourself to Herz Kalashnikov."

"Maxella, shut up! Bite your tongue and don't open your mouth to the devil!"

"Bartashi, I need a few more passports."

"More? How much do you need, a hundred?"

Bertha burst out laughing. She has a masculine voice, Max thought, and replied: "Leytro had seven names, and I need seven times as many passports."

Max quotes from Tractate Avot 1:5.

These streets mark the couple's limited sphere of action.

There are well-known spa towns in the Czech Republic, which many wealthy Jews used to visit.

The "Settlement Area" law was established by Tsarina Catherine the Great (1791), and restricted the areas of residence and employment of Jews throughout "Holy Russia". Among other things, Jews - except for those with special privileges - were prohibited from living in large cities (Moscow, St.

Petersburg, Kiev). This law was repealed in 1917 , with the fall of Tsarist rule.

A spacious street with many luxurious buildings. On this street was the Jewish community council house, and on the street next to it - the Jewish theater.

Berta chooses rhyming names, and the sound carries her away until she also includes names of colors ("Gele" - yellow; "Grinea" - green).

In those days, a passport also served as an identity card. Prostitutes had a yellow card.

The old man addresses the women in the third person, as required by the rules of etiquette. Bertha answers him in the third person, as required. In contrast, Bertha addresses Kayla in the second person, to emphasize her inferiority. These subtleties cannot be translated into modern Hebrew, so all the dialogues are presented in the second person.

A Jew from Lithuania. Between the Jews of Lithuania and the Jews of Poland there was a barrier of foreignness and reservation. There were many reasons for this, mainly because Poland was a stronghold of Hasidism, and Lithuania - a center of the "dissidents."

A street connecting the old quarter of Warsaw with the modern part. This street was a place where small trade, a kind of market, took place.

The narrator conveys in Yiddish the verse that came to Yarma's memory (Job 1:21).

This is, roughly, what goes through Max's mind: "Aishe beshieshe polavine."

Chapter Three

A

In the middle of the night, the rooster that Kayla had prepared for the atonement for tomorrow, the eve of Yom Kippur, crowed. They had no rooster, because Yarma regarded the custom of atonement as a foolish idea and did not want an atonement rooster. 39 The husband and wife woke up together, and immediately sat up in bed.

“Yarma, did you hear?” Kayla asked.

"Yes, I heard."

"Yarma, this is a bad sign."

"Why is that?"

"If a chicken crows like a rooster, it means you won't survive until the end of the year."

"You mean the chicken?" Yerma tried to be clever.

"Yarma, don't joke. The whole year passes as it does. But Yom Kippur is a holy day for me. Every year, in any situation, I made amends and lit a large candle in the synagogue. The sun calls it a soul candle."

"And what were you doing when you were at Tamke and what customer came?"

"We all fasted on Yom Kippur, and we wouldn't break the fast even if the emperor himself came. We had two shacks, and they received all the guests. When it got dark, we all went to the synagogue to hear the blowing of the shofar."

"Nonsense. Empty things. There is no God," Yarma claimed.

"Yarmela, don't talk like that. If I go to my death, hire a Jew to say Kaddish over me."

"What happened to you? You're strong as iron."

"Yarmela, no one knows when his day will come. They will bury me in Prague behind the fence, but I want you to put a tombstone on my grave. Engrave my name and my father's name on it. I saved money for this, and put it aside."

"You have a hidden bundle, huh? Who gave you money? Sergei Davidovich?"

"I have. He didn't give it to me. This money is for a grave plot and shrouds. For everything I need. I don't want to lie in someone else's shrouds."

"You are not yet lying in the grave. Much water will still flow in the Vistula until your time comes."

The husband and wife fell silent. The silence lasted until the hen crowed again.

"Yarma, do you hear? Oh! I'm scared!"

"I hear, I hear. They pushed a rooster at you, not a hen."

"No, Yarmela. This is a chicken. It doesn't have a gizzard. Tomorrow, after they slaughter it, you'll see that it has eggs in its stomach."

"How do you know what's inside her?"

"I felt it when I bought it, and I felt there was an egg in there."

"Nonsense. We used to say: What a person puts into their head is worse than an illness. We had a girl who went out at night without a headscarf on her head. A bat got into her hair, and everyone said she wouldn't survive until the end of the year. She took it so hard to heart that she stopped eating, and just howled and cried endlessly. That's why she died. Not because of the bat."

The husband and wife fell silent and listened. The hen fell silent too. Yarma began to mumble and clear his throat. "Yarmal, what happened?" Kayla asked worriedly.

Yarma waited a moment. "Kayla, since you believe in God, I want you to swear to me on a Torah scroll that the old man did not - - -" and Yarma blurted out a foul word.

"Yarmal, what's wrong with you? I already swore on my late mother. It didn't get far at all. Just a few kisses. He's barely breathing. This old man is barely alive. His soul is hanging on the tip of his nose. He'll be gone soon."

"I want you to swear on the five pillars."

"Do you have a Torah scroll here? I'm willing to swear on a Torah scroll with black candles."

"I want you to swear on Yom Kippur."

Kayla flinched.

"Why are you torturing me? I swore to you long ago that I would always tell the truth and deny nothing. When Blind Iche forced me to lie down, I immediately told you."

"Blind Iche is sick. He was like a father to me. He sent me packages when I was in prison. The old dog is a stranger. As long as we are husband and wife, I don't want any clown to take ownership of you."

"You gave me instructions to be nice and get closer to him. Because of you, Max thinks I already belong to him. I don't want Max and I don't want the old man. You yourself once said that you were willing to live with me on just bread and water."

"Even bread and water are not free, and you have to pay rent. You always declare that neither of us needs anything. But when we go out for a walk, you look at every lady and exclaim: What a beautiful dress! What beautiful shoes! What earrings! When you pass by shop windows and see the mannequins in the latest fashions, you literally get glued to the window and can't be torn away from them. You yourself want to dress up in fancy clothes."

"Not true. I like to look. No more!"

"We can't stay stuck here, in this place. We pay sixteen rubles a month in rent, and the walls are full of bedbugs. I hear the mice running around. When they wash the floors on the floor above us, the water runs down the ceiling like a gutter."

"I'm ready to go work as a maid."

"I disagree. You yourself told me what happened when the pimp sent you to work as a maid. The landlord and his nice son crawled over you and climbed on you. Yes, both of them!"

"Today no one will be able to climb me."

"Climb, climb."

Kayla sat up with a swing that shook the wooden boards under the straw mattress. The bedboards creaked, and she shouted:

"What are you nagging me for? Why are you torturing me? You yourself drove me to the old man's apartment. Ever since lame Max has been here, the two of you have been thinking about how to sell me. I can't wait for the old man to die. It doesn't suit my character. I can't keep reminding him to leave me an inheritance."

"You said yourself that he offered it to you."

"You know how it is with old people. Sometimes this way, sometimes that way. Sometimes he starts talking as if he's about to lie down on the purification table. Sometimes he suddenly says he wants to go to the hot springs and take me with him."

"Were you in bed with him?"

"I was with him, but I didn't sleep with him."

"He tried, huh?"

"Yes, no. A kiss, a caress. He stroked my hair and said: 'Golden hair, like a queen's crown.'"

"What else?"

"Nothing."

"What did Max do to you?"

"When? Nothing. He talks endlessly, through fire and water, but only talk. He said you agree to everything, that you signed an agreement. He speaks Yiddish, but like that, like a lawyer. One thing you need to know: if we go with him to those distant lands and he pays for the tickets, he will be the owner of the house, the one who decides everything. For him, I'm just a piece of meat for sale. You know that

very well, only you pretend not to know or understand. Like a carcass. If he becomes your partner and I'm the merchandise of both of you, what are you pretending for? Look, it's already daylight outside."

"Yes, yes."

"The sky is blood red. Outside it feels like it's Yom Kippur Eve."

"Maybe yes, maybe not."

"I want to make amends and slaughter the chicken. When a chicken crows like a rooster, it must be slaughtered immediately."

"The slaughterers are still sleeping. I'll take a nap too."

Yarma turned and faced the wall. Kayla continued to sit in bed, holding her hair in both hands. She got up with a heavy heart, a bitter taste in her mouth. There were times when she thanked God ten times a day for sending Yarma to her, to rescue her from the mire. But since Max came back, Yarma has changed completely. He speaks to her not as a husband to his wife, but as a pimp or a shepherd of prostitutes. He keeps telling her about the good fortune and all the joys and successes that await them in distant lands. Piles of gold are rolling down the streets there, and you only have to bend down and pick them up. He is jealous of her and afraid of Max, but asks her to bare her breasts and show them to Max. He and Max keep joking and saying cheerfully how good it would be if the three of them were in bed together. What happened? Has she gotten tired of him? Or has he become so eager for money? He openly speaks in defiance of Max, yet he never stops praising and commending him, saying what a clever guy he is, how rich he is, and even knows the fine print. Sometimes he and Max wink at each other and smile slyly, like allies. The matter with Sergei Davidovich bothers her. For her, it's a disaster. Every time she goes to the old man, her heart beats wildly, as if she's done something criminal. These three - Bertha, Max and Yarma - are also capable of poisoning the old man. They openly say that his days are numbered. If they plot something and their plot is carried out, they will blame it on her. Kayla shuddered. Her seven good years are gone. They want to drag her back into the mire.

She sat like that for a while, then lay down. She began to dream even before she fell asleep. In her dream, she was lying naked between Max and Sergei Davidovich. Sergei Davidovich was not yet old. His beard

was black, not white. Both men were sucking her breasts, curling her hair. Yerma came from the kitchen, wearing a white apron and a chef's hat. He was holding a tray full of food in his hands. Suddenly Kayla saw that the apron was stained with blood. Had Yerma become a slaughterer or a butcher? Was he no longer my husband? When did we get divorced? Suddenly Yerma began to laugh and neigh like a horse. He threw the tray, and it hit with a sharp clang. The thunder of the fall woke Kayla. Through the window, a piece of sky was visible, burning like a river of fire. A hot stove, laden with coals, was rising across the sky and chunks of fire were falling from it. Oh, this must be hell, Kayla thought. She clearly saw a bed of nails, flames, and firefighter helmets, and heard muffled screams. Kayla had never known such things, and it was clear to her that the end was near.

on

Kayla prepared for Yom Kippur the way she had learned at her parents' house. In the morning, after delivering the chicken to be slaughtered, she served Yarma challah dipped in honey, semolina stew with meat, and plum compote for dessert. Then she cooked chicken soup with dumplings for lunch. Kayla enjoyed the preparations. Throughout her years in the brothels, there was nothing she craved more than working in the kitchen and cooking. She loved buying groceries, soaking meat in water, salting it, skimming the foam from the soup. She even loved washing dishes. Yarma and Max just wanted to take her to eat at a tavern, or at a restaurant at the end of Gnoina Street. But Kayla preferred to fix herself lunch or dinner. The atmosphere in the house is pleasant when the fire is burning in the kitchen and steam rises from the pots.

Yarma ate the meal on the eve of Yom Kippur, but then he mocked all the traditional customs and turned them into dust and ashes. What good was a meal for him if he did not intend to fast? He said openly: There is no God, and there is no one who sits in heaven on a golden throne and judges each person - for tribe or for grace. During the prayer of the All-Merciful, Yarma went out to the "Ham" streets 40 to meet Max in some gentile cafe. Kayla went to the synagogue on Krochmalena Street, house number twenty-three. They did not let her in and she stood outside with the other prostitutes and asked to listen to the cantor's singing, the voices of the men praying and the women's crying. Yarma returned home late at night and tried to make love to her, but she did not let him. Yom Kippur belongs to God.

The next morning, Yerma bathed, soaped himself, shaved his beard, and smoked a cigarette. He knew these were serious offenses, but it was wrong to provoke anger. Then he made himself breakfast, and when he was finished, he said he was going to see blind Icha, who had been released from the hospital. Kayla knew he was going to see Max and would not return home until the evening. She was hungry and thirsty, even though she had eaten a lot on Yom Kippur Eve and had taken eleven sips of water—a

remedy for thirst.

She didn't feel like going to the synagogue. Why would she stand outside with all the prostitutes? Why would she listen to all their lies and heresy? Although she could have bought herself a seat with the help of the women of a distant synagogue, in a place where she was not known, she didn't have the appropriate attire for this holy day. In general, she didn't know the prayer and she didn't have a siddur or a cycle for the High Holy Days. Well, my year's reckoning had already been decided one way or another. Now, precisely, she felt how disconnected she was from God and man. During the year, she hadn't thought about it, and only on the High Holy Days did the feeling of alienation attack her. Why would she deserve to be written in the Book of Life? She sat on a chair and immersed herself in memories of days gone by. There were days, even entire weeks, when she forgot that she had brothers and sisters somewhere. Her mother had died. And who knows, maybe her father was still alive? Her hometown seemed far away to her, and she herself had come of age. Did everything that had happened in her life happen in a dream, or in another incarnation? All sorts of forgotten events, faces, conversations, emerged and rose from the recesses of her memory. No. She was not born in the void, nor from a still stone. She is the daughter of generations of Jews who suffered, worshipped God, gave birth to children and raised them. Her grandparents lie in the cemetery, and their names are engraved in Jewish letters on the tombstone. They are surely ashamed of her - both then, when they lived in this world, and now, when their souls rest in the next world. And yet they cannot completely erase her very existence. Didn't God create her too? After all, he gave her arms, legs, a stomach, a chest, a head. He also gave her the ability to think. If it weren't for God, she wouldn't be sitting here and breathing, not even for a moment.

Kayla went back to bed and fell asleep. This time she didn't dream at all, or didn't remember anything. When she woke up, she looked at the wall clock that Yarma had bought a few years ago and saw that she had slept for three hours. The sounds of prayer could be heard from the Hasidim's house of prayer. Jews asked God for mercy, shouted and begged Him to give them a livelihood, health, peace from their children, and strength to study Torah. The Gentiles also went to their "house of prayer," crossed themselves, and made supplications before the statue of Jesus. 41 But if the God of Israel is a true God, how does he allow the Gentiles to live, marry women, give birth to children, and devour pork? Why doesn't he send fire from heaven to burn them all? Well, when will the Messiah come? When will the dead be resurrected? Kayla felt the need to talk to someone, a person who knows what is written in the holy books and understands what is said in them. Yarma once studied, but now he laughs at the holy things of Israel.

Kayla lay back down on the bed, and fell asleep again. Suddenly she woke up in a panic. Someone woke her up. Max. She had fallen into such a deep sleep that she didn't remember that today was Yom Kippur. Max stood in front of her, dressed and polished: in a knit suit, starched collar, tie, stiff hat. In his hand he held the cane with the silver handle. He smelled of perfume and alcohol. He pulled her hair, bent down

to her, and called:

"Happy holiday, Kayla."

"Where is Yarama? What do you want?"

"The sin of Yom Kippur."

"What?? No!"

"yes!"

He threw himself on the bed. Strangely enough, in all the years no one had tried to rape Kayla. For what? She gave herself willingly. Kayla tried to scream, but Max covered her mouth with his hand. Somehow, she was weak after the long sleep she had fallen into. Or was it the fasting? She was stunned, helpless. Max demonstrated brute strength, despite his disability and the small size of his body. Kayla struggled with him but could not overcome him. She was afraid to hit him too hard, for she feared he would tear her clothes. One of his hands slapped her, and the other pulled at her hair. His knees drove like two pegs between her legs, spreading them apart with unbearable force. He tore her panties off her body and raped her. No. It was not only his strength, but also her weakness. A vague desire to fall into the pit of hell once inside her. She wanted to sink so deep that she would never be able to try to rise up and escape from the abyss. Whatever it was, she was lost, a hidden voice cried out inside her. She lay still and let him do with her as he pleased, ready to suffer any punishment or die for her sins. He said something to her, but she didn't answer. She closed her eyes as if surrendering herself completely to the darkness of doom; she felt as if she were already dead and lying not in her bed but in a grave. Max understood what she was going through, and scolded her: "Don't play tricks. Enough with the shtick-swallowing! I didn't kill you!" He slapped her and got out of bed. Now he grumbled to himself and fumbled with his stick among the bedclothes, as if looking for something. Kayla heard him whisper venomously: "You wish me all the bad that will come upon Shunai's head, huh? Sarah, daughter of good people! 42 A holy rabbi! Filth with kosher turbans!" He grabbed her shoulders, shook her, pulled her hair. But she insisted on drawing herself together, not looking at his face or saying a word to him. She heard his words: "From this day forward you must love me to the last drop of your blood. You will live if I order you to live, and if I order you to harm yourself, you will do it. You now have two husbands: me and Vyarm. Open your eyes, or I will gut you!"

Her eyelids trembled as if she wanted to open her eyes, but she squeezed them shut with force. He leaned over her, kissed her forehead, her nose, her closed eyes, her lips. He grabbed one of her curls, twisted it around his finger and pulled it hard, as if trying to tear it out by the root, and shouted angrily: "If you're late, we'll send the Hevra Kadisha wagon and do what's necessary with you. If you want to live and enjoy life, you must do what we tell you. Remember that you're a rag, a promiscuous whore, a miserable whore!" He spat at her, and the boiling saliva that spurted from his mouth burned her cheeks.

The door creaked as he forced it open and said, "Happy Yom Kippur! We'll see you tomorrow." Max didn't hesitate, and left with a slamming door that shook the windows.

third

Max woke up at five in the morning, and as always jumped up in a panic. Someone rang the doorbell. Was it the police? Someone had tipped him off? He pulled out the gun hidden under the pillow, approached the door, and asked who was there. No one answered. He opened the door and peered out. The hallway was empty. Strange. Delusional. Max was astonished, and his hand holding the gun trembled. There was no bell on the door of his room. The row of other doors along the hallway reminded him of the row of cells in prison. It was all because of my tense nerves, he thought. Not a night went by without him waking up in a panic from delusions or hallucinatory visions: someone pushing his shoulder and calling his name, the jingling of chains, the blast of a trumpet, or the sound of gunfire. His fears were mixed with intense lust. He was attracted to some woman, some man, and even to a creature from another world - a nightingale who came into the dreams of yeshiva students and seduced them into lewd acts. Max went to the window, moved the curtain, and glanced at the rising dawn. A new day had begun in Warsaw. The stars in the sky turned pale and went out one by one. Birds began to chirp. Workers who set up shop at dawn were already standing in the street, clutching bundles of food and tools, waiting for the tram. What to do? - Max pondered. This is how God has arranged his world: some people work hard for a loaf of bread, while others squander fortunes. Nothing will change the situation. No parliament or people's council, no constitution, no revolution - nothing will change the situation.

Ever since childhood, Max had had the feeling that he would die young. That was why he was amazed that he had lived until now. That was why a greedy urge had also been brewing within him to seize everything and enjoy himself as much as possible, before the fuse of his life went out. He longed for adventures and sins, for exploits that would make the world laugh and cry. He wanted to be written about in newspapers, in history books. Maybe to assassinate the Tsar? Maybe to set fire to some magnificent palace? Maybe to throw a bomb at the Governor-General's castle? Not a day went by

without him reading eagerly about Rasputin. 43 Why couldn't he, Max, be some kind of Rasputin?

Max went back to bed, tossed and turned, and tried to fall asleep. After a while he turned on the lamp on the small nightstand and began to do calculations: how much money he had, how long this amount would last, how much the hotel would cost him, the expenses for Yarma, Kayla, Bertha? And what about the costs of transporting the shipment of females to South America? Finally he got tired and fell asleep. Someone knocked on the door. This time it was real. He was being called to the phone. He quickly wrapped himself in a robe, put his feet into slippers, and went out into the hallway to answer the phone. It was Bertha.

"Maxel, did I wake you up? It's already nine."

"Are you awake? I am always awake. Like God who neither slumbers nor sleeps and watches over His people Ishmael." 44

"How was Yom Kippur for you?"

"The pork is very tasty in Poland. I paid a visit to the red Kayla."

"Whatever it is, may you get a good grade." 45

"I'm not asking for any notes from anyone."

"You shouldn't talk like that. I need to talk to you about something important. Listen!"

"I am not deaf."

"Sergey Davidovich suddenly fell ill."

"And was he healthy before?"

"Don't joke. He can't talk. He lost his tongue. I asked him not to fast, but he went to the synagogue. They brought him from there on a stretcher. Had a stroke or who knows what."

"Did you call the doctor?"

"I haven't called anyone yet."

"Have you searched through his belongings? He needs to be tested for chametz. Check every corner."

"Maxell, the old man doesn't carry his belongings with him."

"Too bad. What about the will?"

"He has a will in a safe somewhere. But where? Maybe in Russia. After Sofya Mikhailovna died, he started saying that the will should be changed. But I don't know what he did in the end. If he didn't rewrite his will, a huge sum of money would fall into the hands of Sofya's husband. What a rude, scoundrel. Sergei's wife is no better than him, not even by a hair. A vile piece of shit, just a bitch."

"Tell your Kalashnik to write a will, and have the old man sign it. Do it! For better or worse."

"He can't hold a pen in his hand."

"Push a pen between his fingers. You and Kalashnikov can lead his hand, and that way you'll get a signature from him. Don't wait too long!"

"Who will he register the property for? You have to be careful! You need witnesses for a will. His witch, the damned bitch in Russia, has a whole bunch of lawyers. Trials will start and who knows what. I don't want to be dragged into the porridge that will be cooked in court. I'm not completely righteous, and they demand that I swear on the Torah. Nothing good ever comes of it."

"Stupid talk! What is a Torah scroll? A piece of cowhide that was made into a scythe. The scribe who wrote it is a beggar. Just a bum. Moses ascended to heaven just like I ascended to the moon. If you anoint the right people and do it properly, you can move on. You, Bertha, should have gotten the bells from him long before that happened."

"I didn't want to be his mistress."

"Well, you'll be rewarded for that in heaven. They'll give you a whale's tail at the feast of the righteous."

"Maxell, let's stick with our previous plan. The old man will write the main part of the property in the will in favor of the red Kayla. That she will swear a false oath. Not me. She is young, beautiful. She will be believed. Either way, in the end we will get the candy."

"Does Yarma already know that the old man is sick?"

"Except for you and God, no one knows anything."

"What about your runner?"

"He's silent, Max'le. Get dressed and come here. I'll make breakfast. You, like all men, have no feelings. But me, my heart ached when I saw what happens to a person in a few minutes. I lost my desire for everything around me. What's all the trouble for, if this is what happens in the end? Answer me!"

"If I knew the answer, I would remove the Rebbe of Meyhofitz 47 from his chair and take his place. All this crap isn't worth a penny. Just a mirage for the demons."

"Are you coming?"

"Do I have a choice? You're in love with your Hertz Kalashnikov, and I'm in love with you. Plain and simple."

"Liar, you little bastard. I'm an old mare."

"You have more fire than ten young women."

"Come!"

Bertha hung up the phone, and Max returned to his room. "Well, what a day it's starting out like today!" he said to himself out loud. He liked being asked for advice when a complicated situation suddenly arose, or a tough nut to crack. How wise is it to just drive along the paved King's Road? On the other hand, if you're cunning and clever, there's no situation you can't get out of. He washed up at the sink and got dressed. There were days when Max regretted returning to Warsaw. But something about this city attracted him. Here they didn't mix Yiddish with Spanish or English, like in Buenos Aires or New York. Here they spoke a real mother tongue, Yiddish properly. Not far from here, a few hours' train or carriage ride away, his ex-wives lived and raised their children. Even here, in Warsaw, he left behind a lover. He hadn't forgotten her, and she hadn't forgotten him. Is it possible to forget such things? No. One takes such things with one everywhere. Even to the grave. Max wasn't particularly attracted to Bertha. But he enjoyed arousing lust in others. Besides, you never know what a foreign body tastes like until you taste it. Here, in Poland, they still heard talk that had long been forgotten in America. Here they understood a joke, caught witty words. The females here are more cordial, and take men seriously. One thing is missing in Poland: money.

D

Everyone gathered together: Bertha, Herz Kalashnik, Max, Yarma, the red Kayla. First they caught a conversation at Bertha's house. Herz Kalashnik had already written a will, according to which Kayla-Leah Kupermintz was to inherit half of Sergei Davidovich Kaufman's property. The group chose to appoint Kayla as the heiress because she had never been to prison, and no criminal case was pending against her. Besides, the fact that a man would write off a considerable sum of money in favor of a young lover is more plausible than bequeathing the money to an old prostitute's agent. According to the will, there were to be three guardians of the property: Herz Kalashnik, Bertha Stein, and Leon Gempner (Max). Herz Kalashnik had connections with a notary who knew how to profit from all sorts of fraudulent schemes. What do we say here? - This man liked to be given a juicy bone to lick... They just needed witnesses and a signature that looked genuine. Handwriting experts shouldn't be able to prove that the signature is forged.

Herz and Berta organized everything. One witness was Zushka, Sergei Davidovich's maid. The other witness was the doorman of his house. Herz Kalashnikov managed the affairs of this house, and the doorman, who was subordinate to him, signed all the documents that the owner of the house presented to him.

Everything was agreed upon and decided, and Bertha served breakfast: fresh bagels, rolls with butter, white cheese, salted fish, and for dessert - coffee with cream. Then the five of them went into Sergei Davidovich's apartment. Zushka opened the door to the bedroom. The windows here were covered with heavy, opaque curtains. Sergei Davidovich lay in bed with his eyes closed. His face was as white as a dead man's. They could barely feel his breathing. Hertz Kalashnikov carried with him a flat wooden tablet with the written will, an inkwell, and a pen. Kayla saw the human patient, and clenched her fingers. Her face contorted as if she were about to burst into tears. But Yerma signaled her angrily, signaling her to keep quiet. Everything was going according to plan. Herz Kalashnik placed the wooden board on the bedspread, spread out the rolled-up sheet containing the will on it, and took the patient's limp hand out from under the blanket. But at that moment Sergei Davidovich's face contorted and his lips moved as if he wanted to shout or say something. Herz continued his work. He quickly pushed the pen between the old man's fingers and began to carefully guide it across the paper. His eyes followed Sergei Davidovich's previous signature, and he was careful to trace each letter according to the model in front of him. The patient twitched several times, but Herz Kalashnik gripped his palm to prevent it from shaking. Max could not help himself, and during the tense moment he reached out and pinched Bertha's plump buttocks. Herz Kalashnik finished and nodded, as if confirming that the signature looked real. Not fake at all. Max carefully examined the two signatures, and after a careful comparison of what he understood, he complimented Herz Kalashnik: "Wonderful! Unusually successful! You deserve a medal!" Max clicked his tongue, and it sounded like a gunshot. He was a master at clicking his tongue. He also knew how to move his ears, blow melodies that came out of his nose as if from a trumpet, and talk from his stomach. Kayla remembered that Max had performed wild lewd antics in the brothel in Tamke. All the prostitutes were amazed and laughed until they cried.

Herz Kalashnik was a tall, thin man with a narrow face, gray hair, and a cropped mustache. He acted like a respectable official, as if he were a member of the authorities rather than the underworld. He wore a stiff hat and a black tie. He was rarely seen without a briefcase outside the house. Fountain pens and thick reading glasses protruded from the front pocket of his coat. The room where his desk stood was called an "office," and people could only come to it at set times. Like a doctor. Herz Kalashnik put the will inside his briefcase, and Max read:

"Kayla, you are a rich woman. Congratulations!"

"What will happen to this person?" Kayla asked.

"What are you shaking for? They won't submerge him in salt water," Max answered her.

The following night, when Kayla was lying in bed with Yarma, he told her that Sergei Davidovich had been taken to the Jewish hospital on Chiste Street. Bertha sent a telegram to Mrs. Kaufman, Sergei Davidovich's wife, to inform her that her husband was paralyzed. A return telegram immediately arrived from Kiev, saying that the woman would be here soon. Yarma tried to speak to Kayla's heart:

"Kelshi, Max is not the angel of death as you claim, but the prophet Elijah. He will bring us luck and happiness. We will go on a journey with him. Max will take us abroad. We will be partners and share the old man's inheritance together. Max has crazy luck. Everything he touches turns to gold. He is also an educated man. Quite a lawyer."

"Yarmal, don't mention him, and don't talk about him."

"What are you afraid of? He's a human, not a demon."

"Yarmal, my heart says that no good will come of this."

Kayla didn't tell Yarma what Max had done to her. But there were signs that he knew anyway. Until now, Yarma had never left the house or left her alone on a holiday. A long time ago, he even went with her to a synagogue on a remote street, in an area where most of the residents were Gentiles. This year he returned late at night on Yom Kippur, and he smelled strongly of Yish. After Max raped her, Kayla lost all desire to be with Yarma. But he pounced on her like some drunken stranger, covering her mouth with his hand when she tried to say something. It was clear: Yarma had gone somewhere on purpose so that Max could rape her. He had already called Max "my brother-in-law." She, Kayla, could not read or write. But she knew Yarma, and knew how to read and understand his overt and covert antics. Sometimes he pretended to be jealous of her, and beat her for smiling at a strange man. But at the same time he revealed to her that he could not love a reserved and modest girl. He only yearned for a female who ate from many pots, as the Poles say. He also confessed to her that he and Max had had sex when they were in prison together.

There were days when Kayla had fooled herself and thought that Yarma would change his ways, find a job as a freelancer or an employee, and pull her out of the mire. But he had never looked for a decent job. The plans he had hatched with Max, how to seduce females and drive them into prostitution in countries overseas, the fact that he had sent her to Sergei Davidovich and tacitly agreed to Max's rape of her on Yom Kippur - all these were clear signs that Yarma intended to become a pimp and drive her back to a brothel. Kayla even suspected that Sergei Davidovich had not just fallen ill, but had been poisoned by Bertha. The forged will according to which she - Kayla - would supposedly receive the old man's inheritance, could lead her to the gallows. Now she heard Yarma whispering in her ear:

"Keilshie, Max is obsessed with you, body and soul. We talked about it a lot. I decided to do one-on-one with him."

"What do you mean, huh?"

"He wants the three of us to become one."

Yarma trembled with excitement as he continued to speak. Slowly he revealed to Kayla that he had agreed with Max on a special union. He and she, Yarma and Kayla, together with Max, would be like brother and sister, husband and wife. One soul and one body. From now on she - Kayla - would have two husbands: Yarma and Max. If a man could have two wives, why couldn't a woman have two men? There is a country, further away than China, where one woman has several husbands. Sometimes they live together, like brothers, and sometimes not. If a child is born, all the men are considered to be its father.

Write about it in your diary this year. Max is no stranger to us, Yarma argued. We will all live in one apartment. The three of us will sleep in one wide bed. We will eat together, drink together, go to the theater together. When Sergei Davidovich closes his eyes and we get your share of the inheritance, the three of us will be rich. It's possible that both of them - Yarma and Max - will have to marry the fools who will lead them to South America. But all this is just for show. To deceive the whistleblowers at the border crossings and on the ship. Finally, Yarma noticed that Kayla was boiling, and tried to calm her down:

"Why are you trembling? You have nothing to fear. They won't sell you like a cat in a sack. We both love you. We will open a luxurious salon in Brazil, and you will be the madam there. A maid will stand at the entrance to the salon to serve the customers. We will have the most beautiful women in the world, and distinguished people will come. They will pay a hundred rubles a night. We will buy you everything your heart desires: furs, diamonds. The three of us will eat marzipan and drink champagne. Why are you silent?"

"When we stood under the canopy, you said you wanted to start a decent business."

"What business? What business? The biggest merchants are going bankrupt. There's a crisis in Lodz. There's a strike in the factories every Monday and Thursday. In Russia, they've stopped the trains, and the ships aren't sailing on the Volga. Volga? It's a kind of river. They want to dethrone the Tsar again. We have to get out of here."

"How do you know we'll be better off there?"

"They don't fight wars there. It's too hot there. The poorest eat bananas. The weather forces all men, even those who have wives, to go to brothels. Because of the heat, the blood burns like fire. There are no yellow passports there. There they call a brothel 'institution.'"

"How do you know all this? Did Max tell you?"

"I knew before Max arrived. It's written in the newspapers. There are a shortage of women there. For every female, there are ten men. When you see a woman on the street, you take your hat off to her."

There was silence. Only the sounds of mice scurrying under the wooden floor were heard. Dawn had almost broken when the couple fell asleep. The sound of hammers came from the yard, and Kayla opened her eyes. The holiday of Sukkot was approaching, and the residents of the house were nailing together long wooden beams, fitting doors. A Jew with a white beard and long sideburns was dragging wooden planks, and his wife - a thick Jewish woman with a beard - brought him a saw. A cart loaded with thatch entered the yard through the gate. The Polish peasants from the nearby villages knew when the holiday was coming, while she - Kayla - was mired in a web of sins that one rarely hears about, even among the Gentiles.

According to custom, women made "apology" with a chicken, and men - with a rooster (male).

In Yiddish: Oif Yanaen - Gasen. That is, the area where Gentiles lived.

The narrator uses words that indicate the disgust and repulsion that prevailed on the Jewish street towards everything related to the Christian religion. The church is called "Tifla" (inverted prayer) and Jesus - "Yuzel".

Sarah Bat Tovim lived in the first half of the eighteenth century and was considered a model of a pious woman. She wrote supplications, women's prayers, and information sheets on the three commandments that women must observe ("Mitzvot Hanna": the breaking of challah, the niddah [purification], the lighting of candles).

Rasputin (the wonderer/the reveler/the rebel) was the nickname of Grigory Yefimovich Oterfeyev (born in 1869 , murdered in 1916). A darkly charismatic figure. His name is involved in scandals, intrigues and crimes that took place in government circles. He had great influence at the court of Nicholas II due to his closeness to the Tsar's wife, who believed in the supernatural healing powers attributed to him.

An ironic parody of the well-known verse: "The keeper of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."

Originally: "Kuital": a note, a written request that would be handed to a righteous person. Here, the "Kuital" refers to the belief that a person's fate is written in a book by a court of law from above.

This refers to a scribe - someone who copies Torah scrolls and mezuzot.

This is what the Jews called Kiev, the capital of Ukraine.

Chapter Four

A

Early on the morning of Sukkot Eve, Yarama went out to meet Max. They planned to meet Berta, and perhaps go to the hospital together to find out how Sergei Davidovich was doing. Kayla was left alone in the house. It was a bright, sunny day, and Kayla went out into the yard. The yard was full of Sukkots—from the gate to the stable where Lezer the coachman kept his horses. Only one Sukkah was beautifully built. The others were made of patchwork: old, long, narrow wooden beams, joined together in a strange jumble. The owner of one Sukkah had attached a rolling pin to a board for salting meat, and attached crate planks to them. The doors of many Sukkahs hung crookedly on their hinges. In other Sukkahs, bedspreads or sheets dangled from the opening instead of doors. All the Sukkahs were decorated on the inside. The children in the room and the boys in the Beit Midrash had hung Sukkah decorations: paper lanterns, colored paper chains. Here and there they hung an apple, a pear, a bunch of grapes. The women cooked the holiday meal in advance. All the apartments smelled of meat dishes, fish, glazed carrots, plum compote. All year round they lived from hand to mouth and ate the bread of poverty. But on Sukkot, one must show off to the neighbors the portions of food served to the men sitting in the sukkah. The table must be covered with a clean tablecloth, with fine plates and fine utensils. The women always said that on Sukkot, the females are content with a little of the little, a crumb here and a crumb there, 48 and all the good things are carried to the males sitting in the sukkah. Well, but when the women come to the sukkah in the evening to bless the candles, they must dress up in holiday clothes and adorn themselves with jewelry, if they haven't borrowed it first or sold it, God forbid.

Kayla remembered Jewish customs well, even though she had lived a life of disgrace for many years, abandoned and rejected by God and man. Her father was a shemesh. Early in the morning he would go from house to house with a wooden mallet and knock on the shutters to wake people up and urge them to get up to worship the Creator. Her mother - a devout woman with a headscarf - was a dancer in a mikveh. Kayla's hometown was full of Judaism and piety. Only she, Kayla, was drawn to a life of debauchery and debauchery. When she was nine years old, she saw a stallion mount a mare in the market - on a fair day - and she was immediately seized by a lust that would not subside for the next few years. At twelve, she was already frolicking with young rascals, even with scoundrels. And yet, in all her

wanderings, she never forgot home. Marriage to Yarma was the pinnacle of her life's happiness. But lame Max spoiled everything. He was not content with the life of luxury he had achieved, and made efforts to harm God. How could a tiny man, a miserable fly, wage war with God? Kayla's grandmother, Yakhneh-Gita, used to say: God does not respond immediately. He waits a long time. But in the end, He punishes with all the severity of justice. Not a day went by that someone on the street did not collapse due to some illness. Every few days, the hearse would arrive at their home. It was not only old people who died. Young people also breathed their last. Often, the wailing of women burst into the Hasidim's synagogue, ran to the Ark of the Covenant, and tore the sky with cries of anguish, pleading with God to heal the sick.

Kayla longed to take part in the joy of the holiday. The coachman, Lazer, actually allowed Yarma to sit in his sukkah, which stood between the stable and the shared bathroom. But Yarma was no better than Max. He did not pray, and on Shabbat he refused to make Kiddush. Kayla had to beg him, and with difficulty convinced him to put up a mezuzah on the door of their apartment. Yarma's talk about having two husbands filled her with terror and fear. She had desecrated the sanctity of Yom Kippur, and therefore she felt that she would not live to see the end of the year. In the last few nights, she had been tormented by horrible dreams. In her dreams, dead women came to her, with yellow faces and bodies wrapped in shrouds. They shouted at her, spat at her, and splashed blood and pus on her. They spoke in the language of prayer, and threatened her with severe punishments. Her grandfather appeared before her, wrapped in a tallit and a white coat, his head covered in a turban and his beard hanging down to his knees. This beard continued to grow in the grave - a thought crossed Kayla's mind, while she was sleeping. Grandpa's beard wasn't that long when he was alive! Her grandfather waved a bony fist and blew a long, twisted black trumpet. He shouted at her: "Boycott you! Strange death!", and the trumpet in his hand emitted a tongue of fire and smoke.

Usually Kayla woke up hungry and thirsty, and always felt the need to smoke. This time she woke up with a parched tongue, a swollen belly, and heaviness in every limb. She had shamed her grandfather in heaven, and he had come to take revenge. Is this my last day? Is it permissible to hold a funeral on the holiday that falls tomorrow? No. Not on the first day of the holiday. One of the old women in the courtyard would have to lend her a shroud. Horror stories of all kinds came flooding back to her memory: about demons and spirits chasing the coffins of sinners; about an angel of doom who came to the bar and asked for his name, and when he didn't answer, he split the grave with a wand of fire; about demons and spirits of destruction dragging the dead over thorns and briers, pits, slushy swamps, lakes of decay. All this went on for centuries, until sinners were allowed to enter hell. There they are laid on beds of nails, their tongues or breasts are pierced and they are hanged, forcibly thrown from a hot fire into a mound of scorching snow, and, God forbid, back from the snow into the fire.

A group of women burst into the gate of the house, crying out, all wringing their hands and wailing

loudly. Apparently someone had fallen ill in one of the neighboring apartments, and the women ran to the Hasidim's study hall to pour out their hearts before the Holy One, blessed be He, and call upon the mercy of Heaven. Kayla followed them with her gaze. Many times she wanted to enter the study hall, but she did not dare to step with her impure feet on the threshold of the holy place. She continued to stand by the window, and for a long time she watched an old Jew who was standing at a table dyeing a red jacket black. The man dipped the garment in a bucket full of black dye, rubbed it with a brush, sighing and groaning. From time to time he threw Kayla angry glances from under his thick eyebrows, and spat at her.

Kayla went out and stood by the basement where Getzl the butcher worked. Getzl stood by a tub full of blood, and received the women and girls who came to him with roosters, chickens, geese and ducks. Feathers flew in the air, and Kayla imagined that the birds were screaming in human voices. God in heaven! I don't want to live anymore! - a hidden voice cried out in her soul. The stench of blood and bird droppings made her nauseous, and she wanted to vomit. Weakness fell upon her. Her mouth filled with a disgusting liquid. Corpses ran before her eyes.

The women, who had entered the synagogue first to tear the sky apart with their cries, returned to the courtyard. Their tear-stained eyes showed the triumphant emotion of someone who believes their prayer has been answered. As soon as the group of women left the building's gate, Kayla cried out and ran to the entrance of the synagogue. She too wanted to turn the world upside down in prayer, to plead for her and for Sergei Davidovich's recovery. She swung open the door of the Ark of the Covenant, and let out a resounding wail that astonished even herself. Someone had already closed the curtain after the mourning women had left. Kayla returned and pushed it aside in hasty haste, opened the doors of the Ark of the Covenant, and glanced at the Torah scrolls covered in velvet jackets and decorated with tassels and embroidered ornaments. On one of them hung a crown made of pure silver. Inside, the Ark of the Covenant was covered with wood the color of which was as red as wine. A holy smell of wax and cloves hit her nose. Kayla grabbed a Torah scroll with both hands, pressed her face to it, and a sob welled up in her throat, but she couldn't control it. She felt the velvet jacket with the gold embroidery in the shape of a Star of David burning and getting wet from her tears. Kayla clung to the Torah scroll, crying like a wounded animal. Her mouth uttered words that she herself did not understand. The Torah students sitting at the tables listened quietly to her cries. From time to time, a sigh escaped the lips of one of the men. Someone approached, stood behind her, and said: "Young woman, enough! You must not cry and scream so much! God is a merciful and compassionate God. He will send complete healing."

It was the sun. He gently moved her from her place and led her to the door. In a flash, Kayla saw through the curtain of tears the bookshelves, the tables with open Gemara books, the boys with wigs, the table, the pillar, the letters "I am equal," the benches - just like in the beit midrash where her father had been a sun. Even the smells were similar. As a child, she used to go to the beit midrash on Fridays to help her

father sweep and wash the floor. On Simchat Torah, she stood there holding a flag with an apple and a candle stuck to its top, and watched as the men danced and sang in honor of the Torah.

She went outside, and a moment later she was in the yard again. At first she wanted to go back to her apartment, but her feet carried her out into the street as if of their own accord. She ran with her arms outstretched, shouting loudly, not knowing where she was headed. Her eyes welled with tears, and a veil like fog covered them. People stopped and looked at her. She entered the gate of house number ten, and only now did she realize where she was going: to the teacher - the dear and good Jew, the one she came to every year to ask about the date of the anniversary of her mother's death. Her mother had died in a leap year, on Adar 2, and Kayla didn't know when to light a candle in her memory at the synagogue. Every year the teacher explained everything to her anew. Now she ran up the stairs and bumped into a girl who was carrying a basket full of garbage downstairs. She shouted at Kayla and called her derogatory names. Kayla opened a door that led to the kitchen, and from there to the courtroom. The room looked like a house of prayer: there were bookshelves, a holy ark. Only the teacher was there: a small, thin Jew, in a velvet cape, a wide belt, a kippah on his high forehead, and a red beard. He stood by a reading stand and looked at an open book. Kayla burst in with a cry: "Holy Rabbi!" and a bitter wail burst from her throat.

on

The teacher, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Thomasover, 49, stood and studied the Gemara Sukkah. On every holiday and festival, the dayan would study the Gemara chapters related to that holy day. He repeated to himself that the height of the Sukkah must not exceed twenty cubits; that the sunlight penetrating the Sukkah must not exceed the shadows; and that there must be at least three walls in the Sukkah. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel drank pale tea from the cup next to him, nibbled on a sugar cube, and from time to time sucked on the mouthpiece of the pipe in his hand. The month of Tishrei is the month of holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hoshana Rava, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah. Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur there are ten days of repentance. On the holiday of Sukkot, the mitzvah of sitting in the Sukkah is observed and blessings are recited over the etrog. On the windowsill, the lulav with the myrtle and the verses of Hoshana were placed. Next to them stood the ark, and inside it was the etrog, which lay wrapped in linen threads. This year, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel had obtained an etrog that he had coveted: a luxurious fruit - rough and plump. From the kitchen came the smells of the dishes that the rabbi had taken pains to prepare for the holiday meal. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel remembered what was said: The children of Israel are beloved by the Creator, therefore He gave them Torah and commandments. The sunlight penetrated through the window and reflected on the beard of the teacher in golden glimmers. The judge's blue eyes peered at Rashi's commentary and the Tosafot. He bought a Vilnai Shas in installments, full of commentaries. Almost four thousand years had passed since Mount Sinai, where the Torah was given to the people of Israel, and Jews had been in exile for two

thousand years. Despite everything, they continued to study Torah, adding to it and enriching it. From time to time, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel grabbed one of his braids and curled it. What a privilege it is to be a Jew and to study Torah! He did not for a moment forget what is said in the Psalms: "I have sought your words as one who finds great spoil."

He studied diligently, but the door opened occasionally and women came in to ask questions. Most of the questions were about kosher matters, especially poultry. What happens if you find a nail in the crockpot? And what if the chicken's wing is broken? If there are smallpox on the intestines, what do you do? There were also questions about meat and milk. The woman boiled milk, and the milk spilled into the pot of meat soup. What do you do? Rabbi Menachem-Mendel remembered that it was not easy to determine that the chicken or stew was prey. Most of the residents of the street were poor people who worked hard for a few pennies. Therefore, the teacher tried to find a permit, relying on Shach, 16, "Pitchei Teshuvah", 50 , which gave kosher in cases of disagreement between the poskim on matters of Shabbat and holidays or in cases where a severe loss was incurred due to a strict ruling.

The weather was warm, even though it was the eve of Sukkot. The window was open and the sounds of the street penetrated inside: the shouts of peddlers, the rattling of carriage wheels, the clatter of horses' hooves, the shouts of carters. Sometimes a fight broke out between a shopkeeper and a customer, young brats shouted, girls laughed wildly. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel thanked God every day that he was among the Torah scholars and not among the vulgar crowd that filled the street.

Rabbi Menachem-Mendel was accustomed to the weeping of women. Since he was a teacher, not a rabbi, the people of the street would come to him with all their troubles and pour out their bitter hearts to him. Sometimes he wanted to cry out to them like our patriarch Jacob, “Is God my enemy?” 51 But to whom would these tormented souls come to seek comfort and encouragement? Now, upon hearing Kayla’s cries of grief, he turned to her and said: “Do not weep. Today is the eve of a holiday. He who sits on high will send complete healing,” and immediately murmured a prayer for the sick. He also prayed for himself. He prayed in his heart that he, Menachem-Mendel ben Teme-Blume, would not fail, God forbid, in his resentment against the Lord of the world, who sends so many plagues and disasters upon the world. Oh, my! The time has come for the Messiah to come, a thought of reproach cried out in his soul. Lord of the world, water has come to the soul! The woman standing by the door burst into bitter tears again. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel waited until she calmed down, then said:

"The sick person will recover thanks to the holiday."

"Rabbi, no one is sick," Kayla sobbed.

"Huh? So what?"

Rabbi Menachem-Mendel turned a questioning glance to the side, and saw a young female. A girl, or perhaps a married woman. He quickly looked away from her.

"What's the matter?"

"Rabbi, I want to do a mitzvah!" Kayla cried out in a tearful voice.

"A mitzvah? Why are you crying if you want to do a mitzvah? There is no shortage of mitzvahs, thank God."

"Rabbi, what should I do?"

"Pray to Him who dwells on high. Give alms. With a few pennies you can make a person happy and revive his soul. The shortage is great. There are Jews on our street who don't have money for the needs of the holiday."

"Rabbi, I have sinned. I want to perform a great mitzvah."

"If you sin, you must repent."

"What does that mean?"

"You need to repent and commit to not continuing to sin. Never. He who sits on high is a merciful and

gracious God. He forgives all who repent with a whole heart."

"Oh, Rabbi!"

Kayla choked and bent over as if something was stuck in her throat, as if she was trying not to swallow or vomit. After a while, a bitter wail erupted from her throat:

"What will I do?"

“What are you, single? Married?” asked Rabbi Menachem-Mendel.

"The Nomad Girl."

Rabbi Menachem-Mendel fell silent. He fell into a long silence, holding his beard and thinking. He heard the woman crying at the door. Finally he said:

"Repentance helps everyone. Even the most wicked person is forgiven in heaven, provided that he understands that he has violated the command of the One who sits on high and repents of it with all his heart. It is not easy. A person must accept torment and penance. He must fast, give alms, recite psalms, pray for the mercy of Heaven. Do you know how to pray?"

"I don't know anything. My father was a dear, God-fearing Jew. He was a saint, but I strayed from the straight path and - - -"

Kayla couldn't continue speaking. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel furrowed his eyebrows.

"It's never too late to repent. Not even when you're lying, God forbid, on your deathbed. After all, you can always repent. But first it's better to make amends. He who curses the mouth of the one who sits on high harms above all, stains his soul. Even a garment needs to be washed, if it gets stained. The soul

needs to be purified - - -"

"Yes, Rabbi, yes!"

"The fact that you're crying so much shows that you're sorry in your heart and soul. Start making amends today. Right now."

"Rabbi, what should I do?"

She means it seriously, thought Rabbi Menachem-Mendel. Poor thing. A kosher soul that has sunk into the lust of the flesh... Finally he said:

"I just remembered something. Here, in this building, lives a tailor. Rabbi Shmerl. A widower, a poor man. Every year he used to sit in my sukkah. Now, not on our side, he is seriously ill. They wanted to take him to the hospital, but he refused to go, because he does not trust their kosherness. I ordered him to go there, because Pikuach Nefesh rejects almost any offense. But he insists and continues to refuse. He is a devout Jew, but he does not know the laws. In the meantime, he is lying alone and there is no one to look after him. My so-and-so and my daughter bring him what they can, but now it is the eve of a holiday, and the women are very busy. Go, go in and help him as much as you can. Visiting the sick is a great mitzvah. It is said about visiting the sick that it is one of the mitzvahs whose fruits are eaten in this world, and for which one receives a reward in the next world."

"Rabbi, where does he live?"

"Here, in this building, in the attic. Everyone knows who he is: Rabbi Shmerl the tailor."

"Rabbi, I want to give you something."

Rabbi Menachem-Mendel recoiled.

"Me? God forbid! I'm not a rich man, but the people on the street pay my wages every week. We, thank God, prepared everything for the holiday."

"Holy Rabbi, I want to kiss your feet!"

Kayla leapt past the judge and threw herself on the floor. With strange speed, she grabbed his feet and began to kiss his slippers. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel shuddered. He broke away from the touch of her hands, glanced at the door as if to flee, and called out:

"What are you doing? This is not the way of Judaism! We, the Jews, are slaves of the One who sits on high. We are not slaves of slaves. Get up! Get up quickly!"

"Holy righteous man, tread on me! Spit on me!"

"No, no, no! This is not the way! Get up! Immediately! This very moment!" commanded Rabbi Menachem-Mendel.

He was so shaken that he crashed into the reading stand and the Gemara fell to the floor, followed by the pipe and the inkwell and the pen. The sounds of the commotion reached the kitchen, and the Rebbetzin ran into the courtroom. She was a thin, pale woman with a narrow face. A light foreign wig covered her head, and her long, wide dress reached the tips of her shoes. After her, the daughter Tsirla came running in. She was a mature girl, with brown hair and ruddy cheeks. Somehow, this face dazzled Kayla. The girl was wearing a pink shirt, and her skirt was narrow and shorter than her mother's. A moment later, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel's son, Bunem, entered the room. He was taller than everyone else. Kayla stood up and spread her arms, as if she wanted to hug everyone. The Rebbetzin asked:

"What's going on here? Who spilled the ink?"

"Mom, this is Kayla the Red!" cried Tsirla.

"Who is Red Kayla? What's all the fuss about?"

Tsirla approached her mother and whispered something in her ear. Bunem bent down and picked up the fallen objects, and Kayla tried to go back and kneel down to help clean the floor. But Bunem blocked her path and stopped her politely. The rabbi shook herself off and called out: "What's going on here? It's the eve of a holiday now! I heard a bang and I thought you tripped and fell, God forbid," she turned to her husband, adding sternly: "They just washed the floors, and there's going to be a mess here again."

The Rebbetzin glared at Kayla. Her large gray eyes filled with irritation, and her face twisted with nausea. This was not the first time a prostitute had entered her house. All the prostitutes would come and ask her the same question: When is the anniversary of their relatives' death? They would stand humbly by the door, wrapped in a sudor, and Rabbi Menachem-Mendel would look at the calendar and answer them. But this red-haired prostitute stood in her short dress next to Rabbi Menachem-Mendel, her hair disheveled and her face covered in red spots. She seemed to have lost the ability to speak, because her lips moved and her voice was inaudible. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel called out: "Shebach, 52 , do not be angry. She is a kosher daughter of Israel, who wants to repent. Repentance corrects everything!"

"Holy Rebbetzin, forgive me!" Kayla shouted and burst into tears. She writhed all over, and tears as big as peas flowed from her eyes. A strange scream escaped her mouth. The scream of a terrified mouse, into which a cat had dug its claws. Tsirla recoiled. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel staggered as if about to fall, and Bunem leapt to his father to catch him and support him. The Rebbetzin said: "It's good that a person repents. But there's no need to turn the house upside down." She, like her husband, also almost collapsed. Tsirla hurried to grab him by the arm.

third

The rebbetzin and her daughter stayed with the teacher in the courtroom, and Bunem went back to the kitchen and looked at the book. Kayla passed by on her way out and asked him which entrance of the building Schmerl the tailor lived in. Bunem stood up and said, "I'll show you."

The young man went down the steps that led to the gate with Kayla. Kayla wiped the tears from her face, and now she saw him clearly: a tall, thin young man with a white face, large gray eyes, and cropped

blond whiskers. He was dressed in Hasidic clothing - a shortened kaputa and a cloth hat, but he was wearing a black tie. Bunem hurried out of the kitchen to show her the way, forgetting to put the book back in its place. Kayla managed to notice the letters of Gentiles on the pages of the book. As they descended the stairs, the young man said to her:

"Shmerel is an Asian idiot. He's sick with typhus, and they wanted to take him to the Jewish hospital. But he's afraid the food there isn't strictly kosher. Here, no one will look after him, and he could die because of his fanatical piety. They're all like that: a bunch of idiots."

“Type?” Kayla asked again.

"Yes, typhoid. Be careful. You can get infected easily."

The guy spoke Yiddish, but Kayla didn't understand everything he said. She had never heard words like "fanatical piety" or "Asian." Even the word "to get infected" was foreign to her. In the brothels they often talked about the chance of contracting syphilis, gonorrhea. But there they used the Polish word "zarazze." 53 Oh, dear boy, son of a bitch! May he be healthy! 54 - Kayla mused, and immediately added and said to herself: And educated too. That I would be the scapegoat of his little fingernail. The tears came back and overcame her again. If she hadn't joined the rude thugs, she could now be a mother and raise children like this guy and his sister. The yard of the building was full of sukkots, like the yard of her apartment building. But the sukkots here were more proper, well-built, without patches. Kayla asked the guy:

"What is your name?"

"Buddha."

"Bonam, huh? I had a nephew named Bonam. What do you do? Do you study at the synagogue?"

"In the synagogue, at home."

"Is the book you read a Polish book?"

"Russian."

"Do you know Russian?"

"Knowledge doesn't come by itself. You have to make an effort and learn."

"Do you want to be a teacher too?"

"No. For what purpose? There are too many rabbis among the Jews. Every third Jew is a rabbi. I want to do something that will benefit both me and society."

"What do you want to be?"

"I myself don't know yet. Here, under Russian rule, Jews are not allowed to acquire an education. Jewish children are not accepted into high school. Certainly not into university. I want to study, but to do that I have to go abroad. How many times have I thought about going to Palestine?"

"Where is it? In America?"

"Palestine is the Land of Israel. There are now Jewish colonies there. Jews cultivate the land, plow, sow, plant vineyards. Normal life is led there. They don't float in the air like here."

He probably doesn't know who I am. He speaks to me as an equal, Kayla thought. Oh, I could kiss every part of him. A new emotion, unknown to her until now, enveloped her. Today she realized for the first time how deeply she had sunk into the depths of depravity, and she could barely keep herself from bursting into tears again. As they stood by the gate, the man asked her: "What is your profession?" Kayla was silent. She didn't understand what the word "profession" meant. He spoke in foreign words. After a

moment, he returned, silent, and asked: "What do you do for a living?"

A lump formed in her throat. Her eyes were as if they were closed, and she could hardly see anything. Kayla cleared her throat and blurted out: "I live in slime!" Then she fled into the entrance that Bunem had pointed out and ran up the stairs, as if she was afraid the boy would chase her. The apartment doors on all floors were wide open, and the smells of holiday dishes wafted from them: soup, roast meat, fresh cookies, flakes, compote. The women cooked and the men continued their work: pounding, sawing, sanding, grinding, operating machines. A mixture of smells hung in the air: aromas of dishes and the smells of paper glue, carpenter's glue, leather, kerosene. The further she climbed, the poorer the doors seemed and the shabbier the furniture. Cradles creaked, babies screamed, and mothers silenced them with songs and scolding: "Sleep! Lyuliu! A-a-a..." One of the mothers lost her patience and cursed the screaming child: "Sleep, you bastard! May your name be erased!" Kayla had not heard such talk for a long time. In the house where she lived with Yarma, there were several couples, and people of various occupations came and went: porters, feather pluckers, goose sellers. Here people know what a home is, what Sabbaths and holidays are, she told herself. She accidentally stepped on a cat's tail, and the poor creature ran away, howling bitterly. Finally she reached the attic. There was a heavy lock on all the doors except one. Kayla assumed it was the door to Schmerl the tailor's room. She wanted to comb her hair, but she hadn't brought her bag and comb with her. What was happening to me today? She wondered. A strong love for the teacher's son awoke in her heart when she remembered how Bunem had spoken to her with complete openness and trust. His masculine voice continued to ring in her ears. She was ashamed that she had left him standing in the yard, and she ran away without saying thank you. For a few minutes he told her things she had never heard in her entire life. Well, and his father, the holy Jew, planted hope in her heart. It was never too late to return to God. She would do as the judge had instructed her: give alms, fast. Kayla pushed the door lightly and it opened wide. A strong stench hit her nostrils. The room in the attic was small and narrow. A little light penetrated through the filthy skylights fixed in the ceiling, near the roof. Half-sewn clothes hung on the walls: overcoats, trousers, bras, thick coats. Cotton filling peeked out between the seams of some, and in others the stiff fabric at the base of the collar peeked out. A man wearing a kippah lay sprawled on a bed covered with dirty linen. Wide sideburns and a shaggy beard the color of rotten straw framed his flushed cheeks, and his yellow eyes stared blankly at him. The shirt he was wearing was covered in bloodstains. Blood seemed to be dripping from his nose. On the iron stove in the corner stood a pot with leftover food, and around it were piled dirty dishes: bowls, plates, cups. The stench of urine and garbage was in the air. The man shouted: "What do you want? Close the door!" Sick, and shouting as if he were healthy, Kayla thought, and asked:

"Are you the one who called Merle the tailor?"

"What do you want?"

"The teacher, that dear Jew, said you were sick and needed to be looked after."

"Huh? Everyone forgot about me. They're leaving me here, lying without a spoonful of hot water. I'll die, and not even a rooster will crow."

"I will help you."

"How will you help me? All the neighbors are evil. The landlord wants to throw me out of here and rent the apartment to some cobbler. The house manager came and listed my belongings. If it weren't for the teacher and the rabbi, I would have been dead a long time ago. Who are you? You look a bit familiar to me. Do you live here on the street?"

Kayla fell silent, and the man continued: "Aren't you one of those?! Yes, I know you! Get out of my house! Quick! Right now! Whore! Promiscuous!" The patient shouted loudly. He sat up with a thud, and Kayla retreated toward the door.

"The holy Jew sent me to you. He knows what I am. I want to be a true daughter of Israel."

"Huh? Someone like you defiles the house. You can't stand within four feet of me!"

"The Rebbe sent me - - -"

"Whore, get out!"

The patient leapt out of bed with a roar of derision. He swung the bedspread off and jumped up and stood on his crooked legs, covered in thick yellowish hair. He stood there, only his shirt on his skin, screaming and yelling. Kayla didn't understand the words that came out of his mouth. He pushed her to the door, opened the door wide and pushed her out. His swing was so strong that Kayla fell backwards.

The man hurried and locked the door immediately. Oh, he broke my back and shoulders, a thought crossed her mind, and she might have muttered to herself. The neighbors must have heard the sound of the blow, and men, women, and children burst out of all the apartments. Kayla lay on her back, her feet resting on the attic floor, and her head on the stairs. They lifted her up and sat her up. Now she heard someone say:

"He has a fever of forty-two degrees."

"This must be the highlight," a young woman commented.

“Look, look! Red Kayla!” one boy shouted.

Someone brought a bowl full of water and gave Kayla a drink. They asked her how she had come here, and she replied that the teacher-teacher had sent her to the patient. “I want to repent and become a kosher Jewish woman,” she said. They stood her up, bent her wrists and legs to see if she had any fractures. They told her to bend her neck. “Oh, a miracle!” the women exclaimed. Suddenly, Bunem, the teacher-teacher’s son, appeared. “What’s all the noise and commotion?” he asked in panic. “People, this is the judge’s son. He will testify that this dear Jew sent me here. Tell them! Tell them!” Kayla screamed. Her voice became hoarse with tears. She bent down and spat as if about to vomit. Bunem confirmed: “Yes, that’s right. My father sent her to do a mitzvah. He told her to help Shamarel the tailor. What happened?” No one answered, and Kayla lamented: "If he couldn't kill me, I'll live forever. He pounced on me like a murderer."

All the neighbors started talking together. The woman, who had first said how feverish the patient was, explained: "This must be his crisis."

Bunem turned to everyone and none of them: "We must take him to the hospital immediately!"

"This can only be done with the help of the police," one of the neighbors replied.

D

Another neighbor went out into the street to find a policeman and ask him to call for a first-aid carriage. But a long time passed, and he still hadn't returned. The other neighbors returned to their apartments. They all closed the door behind them, to make it clear that as far as they were concerned, the matter was over. Bunem stood on the stairs, between one floor and the next, and waited. Kayla came back and lamented:

"I have to thank God that he didn't kill me on the spot. How can a sick person have such strength, the strength of demons? It must be because of the fever. What am I going to do now? I thought my troubles were over. God helped me, and I got married. My husband's name is Yarma. Maybe you know him. But not long ago a demon of destruction arrived here. He came from Buenos Aires and wants to throw me back into the garbage. He also drove my husband crazy. Yarma is completely blinded."

“What does he want?” asked Bunem.

"That they both sleep with me. Such things are unheard of even among pig butchers."

"What is he? A whoremonger?"

"They wanted to sell me to an old man from Russia. The old man got sick, and they took him to the hospital. They made a fake will. Who knows? Maybe they want to poison him. I am what I am, but I know that God punishes for murder. Yom Kippur is a holy day for me. But Max, this dirty bastard, came to me on Yom Kippur and raped me like an animal. Yarma says he doesn't care. They want to carry me somewhere on the other side of the sea and make a madam out of me."

"Run from them like fire!"

"Where will I run? I have a yellow passport. With a passport like that, you can't go anywhere. If a policeman comes in and sees this, he'll send me straight to Had-Gadya."

"Run away to America. To the New World."

"With a passport like that, they won't let me board a ship."

"You don't need a passport. If you manage to sneak across the border, they'll let you board a ship even without a passport. All you need is a ticket. Do you have any money?"

"I have three hundred rubles. No one knows about it. Not even Yerma knows. I'm saving this money so that if I die, it will be for a grave and shroud. I don't want to lie naked in a grave."

"You're not going to die yet. You're young and fresh."

"No one knows what their tomorrow will be. The hearse rolls by every single day. Young people collapse, and before they know what and who it's all over. How much does a boat ticket cost?"

"Fifty rubles. At most, a hundred."

"Oh, and I already thought I was on the right path. Everyone who knows me envied me. Women like me don't get to get married. Something like that only happens once in a thousand. Then along came Lame Max - that's his name - and I was thrown out onto the street again. They want to carve something on my arm. Some kind of sign that I belong to them. If you carve it on your skin, it stays forever. It can't be taken off. With a mark like that on your skin, you don't get a Jewish funeral."

"Why are you talking endlessly about funerals? You're just starting to live now."

"Where will I go? What will I do? If they find out that I went to the teacher and told him what was happening, they will make meatballs out of me. Where do you get a ticket? Where is the border? Where is the ship? I am afraid. The fish eat the body of one who falls into the sea, and he cannot rise in the resurrection."

"How do you know?" Bunem smiled.

"Oh, I know. I'm a human being, not an animal. Once, when I was still in Tamka, an educated man came to us. Not a customer, but someone who sells shirts, tank tops, underwear, socks. Everything in installments. He knew how to write, and he wrote letters for all the girls. He told us everything: about hell, about heaven, this and that. It's all written in books."

"Not everything written is true."

"What do I know? Anyone who can't read and write is blind. If you waste your time talking to me, it's like putting a crown on my head. The neighbors are listening. Look, every time another door opens. They'll still gossip about you. They'll say bad things about you. But - - -"

"Let them gossip. I'm not afraid of anyone."

"My hero, I would like to kiss your feet. I fell deep. Lower than a grain of dust. The one who knew how to write, and would come to all the girls, said that in ancient times they would stone a woman like me. They would force her mouth open, and pour boiling lead into it. It burns the intestines. I would like to spend the night somewhere, so I don't have to go back to those two bastards. But who will let me into their house? You have to register everywhere, and when they see a yellow passport, everyone spits fire and brimstone."

They were both silent for a long time, and finally Bunem said:

"I think I have an idea."

"What idea?"

Bunem was not in a hurry to answer, and after a slight hesitation he said:

"My father doesn't know, but I'm studying with a painter. Huh? No, not to paint walls, but to paint pictures. Portraits and landscape pictures: trees, fields, birds. Nature. We're a group of young painters, who live together like a family. We have a room with a glass ceiling, and everyone pays according to their ability. When painters paint a woman, they need a model. They have to look at someone and draw her form. You can be a model. They'll paint you."

"Will they paint me?"

"They'll make a picture based on your shape. We don't have money to pay for modeling, but you can sleep in our studio. There's a couch there."

"Where is it?"

" At number one, 55 Twarde Street ."

"Oh, God himself sent you to me. After the police find out what happened to the old man, they'll throw us all in jail. He's a rich man, Sergei Davidovich. That's his name. He's a good friend of all the officers. There's a saying: The great are forgiven, and the little ones are hanged. How can I get to the place where the portraits are made?"

"We can't walk together on the street. I'll go there, to the number one tavern, and I'll wait for you at the gate. Do you know how to get there?"

"But what? I was in Pochievo for a while, not far from Banga. I used to pass by there every day. Maybe I'll pop home and take something with me? A dress, a jacket, a shirt? Maybe I should pack a blanket? But that would be too big a package."

"You'd better take a carriage and tell the coachman to take you to number one Tewarde Street."

"A carriage for myself? When the brats in the square see me riding alone in a carriage, without a saddle, there will be a complete commotion in the street. I'll walk."

"How long will this take? It's Sukkot Eve now, and I have to have a holiday meal in the Sukkah with the family and everyone else."

"Nothing. Just a tiny moment. I'll grab whatever comes my way. You and your father, you're both angels, not just any humans. I'd like to be your atonement. I'm willing for you both to trample on me with your feet and bathe in my blood."

"Jews don't bathe in blood. We bathe in our own blood."

"I don't know what I'm talking about. Do you have a key to that room with the portraits?"

"Yes. I have a key."

"Do you have a sukkah there?"

"Sukkah? No. We don't eat in a sukkah."

"Why not?"

"Eh, we don't believe in such things." Bunem replied after a slight hesitation.

"Don't you believe in God?"

"We believe in God, but we don't believe that God commanded us to sit in a tent."

"What did he order?"

"He doesn't command at all. He is silent."

"Your father, this holy righteous man, said that God forgives."

"My father was not in heaven. He repeats what others say, and they were not in heaven either."

"And God is in heaven?"

"Maybe yes and maybe no."

"I'll go. Wait for me there. I thank you a thousand times. I won't forget you until my last day, when they put clay pots over my eyes."

the

Bunem did not walk to Twarda Street, but ran. The thoughts racing through his mind quickened his steps. What is happening to me? Why am I getting involved with someone like her? At home, they will not know where I have disappeared to and will start looking for me. What will he say to Kliatshko 56 and the other painters? What will he say to his girlfriend Saltche? If these shepherds of whores find out what he has done, his life will be in danger. Father is right to call me "confused." I am a wild adventurer, he told himself. Maybe there is still time to get out of this whole thing? Maybe I will not make it to the atelier? But it is terribly cruel to let a broken and shattered girl like her wait in vain at the gate. Bunem had read in one of his books that Schopenhauer's philosophy places mercy at the foundation of morality - in contrast to Spinoza, who placed reason as the primary principle. For Schopenhauer, compassionate identification with everyone who lives and suffers is the essence. Yes. That's it. That's why I can't be a socialist revolutionary or an anarchist. You can't be ruthless and throw a bomb that could hurt innocent people. A compassionate approach holds that everyone is innocent.

Bunem reached the gate of the building at number one, Twarda Street, and stopped to wait. He took out of his waistcoat pocket the nickel watch he had received two years earlier from Meir-Yoel Schwartzstein, a watchmaker who had given one of these watches to anyone who knew fifty pages of the Gemara by heart. The dial of the watch was engraved in Hebrew, “For excelling in his studies.” For a moment he looked around. Jews were passing by on the street, carrying last-minute lulavs and etrogs. Now, on the eve of a holiday, the leftovers remained—after the rich had purchased the most luxurious etrogs. The real buyers hurried with the spoils in their hands—etrogs imported from Corfu and Greece. There was a market in the courtyard of the house, and women were buying dates, apples, pears, plums, grapes. They also bought meat and vegetables. At the gate of the house, they were selling round challahs and pockets filled with berries. The building's occupants had erected sukkots in the center of the market, and were still busy installing the thatch and decorating the sukkah; hanging paper lanterns, colorful paper chains, and other decorative items. How strange! The Jewish people have lived in exile for two thousand years, experienced deportations, torture by the Inquisition, murder at the hands of cross-bearers, and even now - in the twentieth century - are subject to the limitations of the moshav. Despite all this, this people has remained faithful to a God for whom there is no evidence, and for so many years continues to carry out orders and instructions written in a book of unknown date and by whom. On the other hand, Bunem mused, there is some higher power. It doesn't matter if it is called "God," "Nature," "the Eternal Absolute," or any other name. Nothing came into being by itself. Development? What is development? Who developed development?

Bunem was not yet twenty. He had recently turned nineteen. But sometimes he felt like an old man who had been through a lot in his life. He began to wonder and ask questions even before he went to his room, and he drove his mother crazy with repeated questions. As soon as he learned to read Yiddish and a little Hebrew, 57 began to rummage through non-fiction books, Hasidic books, and Kabbalah books, hoping to find answers to his questions there. When he turned twelve, he was drawn to books from the outside world: popular science pamphlets and books, history, geography, astronomy, biology. At fourteen, he was seized by a desire for the female sex. His lust was so intense that he felt his blood boiling in his veins. He read works by Yiddish writers, Hebrew writers, literature translated from foreign languages. His mind was agitated both in waking life and in dreams. The hallucinations that stirred in his soul embarrassed him and filled him with strange fears. The evil instinct, or whatever other force gave rise to these hallucinations of desire, did not even spare the honor of his mother and sister. After a while, Bunem began to paint, and tried to write. He wanted to study and pass the external matriculation exams, he planned to go abroad and study at the university there. One day he met the sculptor Avraham Kliachko, who taught him to paint and even gave him a place in his studio. Bunem secretly bought a suit and a hat for educated people, and kept it a secret. He bought the clothes on Wallabe Street without his parents' knowledge, and hung them in the studio. The secular clothing served him when he went with his girlfriend Saltsche to the theater or the public library. He secretly led a rebellious lifestyle, similar to the young people he read about - the nihilists, the socialist revolutionaries, and the Narodniks who sought to connect with the people of the foreign nation. But his efforts bore no fruit, and he did not

fulfill the aspirations and plans that simmered in his soul - not in painting, not in studies, and not even in love. He had not yet tasted the taste of carnal love. Although his girlfriend Saltesha presented herself as an anarchist and preached free love, she remained a pure virgin. Bunem often toyed with the idea of going to a prostitute. Kruchmalena Street was full of prostitutes. But he could not decide and take action. Abraham Kliatshko gave him a booklet with a list of the dangers associated with venereal diseases. Here, on Kruchmalena Street, all kinds of types with rotten noses walked around. Not long ago, one of the residents of the street, a young gynecologist who suffered from a chronic venereal disease, committed suicide.

Bonham stood by the gate for three-quarters of an hour, and Kayla did not appear. She must have regretted the whole thing, he thought. These types are fickle, living according to their moods. Thus they confirm Dr. Rubin's Hebrew translation of Spinoza's "Theory of Virtue." 58 I'll wait another five minutes, he decided. He looked at his watch and decided to himself that if Kayla did not arrive by the time the big hand reached three, he would return home. At that moment he looked up and saw Kayla. In addition to the bag in her hand, she was carrying a full and overflowing basket, and she looked as if she were about to move. Her face was pale and sweaty. Kayla approached him and asked:

"Have you been waiting long?"

"Well, it doesn't matter."

"I had to take a dress, some underwear, this and that."

"Yes, I understand."

They entered a long courtyard, full of shops, stalls, horse-drawn carts. The place looked like a fair. They traded all kinds of food here: buckwheat, legumes, fruit, cheese, eggs. They also sold furniture, shoes, scraps of fabric. The entrance to the atelier was at the end of the courtyard. Bunem and Kayla climbed five floors. He opened the door, and Kayla saw a large hall full of figures. Most of them were females with bare breasts. Some of them were made of clay, others of plaster. Here and there stood a figure covered in sackcloth. Kayla was startled:

"Oh, full of pictures, like in a pagan cemetery!"

"These are sculptures, not photographers. Come on, there's another room here."

He led her into a room with cans of turpentine on the floor. There was a sofa on which were piled canvases, sheets of paper, wooden boards for mixing paints, pencils, books, rags. Now he said:

"That's it. At night you can offer yourself a bed on this sofa. There's a pillow and a blanket here somewhere. Today is the eve of a holiday, and probably no one will come here. You can sleep here in peace."

"Alone? I'm scared."

"Who are you afraid of?"

"From those photographers."

"Clay figures can do no wrong."

"I'll be afraid. There's something here that reminds me of a gentile prayer."

"I must go. If you are afraid, you will have to return to your Yarma."

"He might come home early today, and if he sees that I've gone and taken a few things with me, he'll be terribly angry. If lame Max comes with him, there'll be a whole mess. Where are the others? You said earlier that there were more here... I forgot what you called them - - -"

"Painters, sculptors. They don't live here. They just work here. Maybe they'll come tomorrow."

"What will I tell them? They'll still think I came here to steal."

"Tell me I brought you here, and that you want to be a model."

"I can't repeat that word. What's a modelist? Wait, I brought a bottle of Yish with me. It's here, in the package. I'm afraid I've confused you for nothing. I have to drink a drop. If not - - -"

Kayla untied the bundle of things she had brought and took out an almost full bottle of Yish.

"I don't see any toast here. I'll drink like this."

And she put the neck of the bottle to her mouth. A gurgling, gurgling sound was heard in the room. Kayla's face turned red. Her eyes widened, her stomach tightened. She sipped eagerly, without taking her eyes off of them. He tried to stop her: "Not so much. You'll burn your own intestines."

Kayla's eyes filled with laughter. "Anyway, everything's burned in me. Come on, I have to kiss you!"

She threw the bottle away like the peasants do in the tavern, leaped at Bunem, caught him in her arms and held him close to her. Bunem blushed with shame, and immediately turned pale with lust. He struggled with her, and at the same time clung to her. She bit his lips. The smell of the Yish that wafted from her mouth intoxicated him. He did not know what to do, and Kayla helped him and shouted: "My child! My master! Take me! Kill me! Do whatever you want with me! Oh, God! Brothers! Father! I love you! I want to die for you!". Profanity mingled with her cries to God. She lifted her legs with the agility of a juggler - like those girls who come to the courtyards of houses, do somersaults, swallow flames of fire, roll over inverted barrels with their feet, and lie naked on a bed of nails. He was a helpless yeshiva boy, and a moment later he became a juggler, rolling, bending, intertwining his limbs with the limbs of the other body. A mixture of endearment words, promises of love, and exaggerations of desire flowed from his lips and astonished him. Kayla burst into loud cries of lust, which startled him. He was afraid that the neighbors would hear the loud sounds, and everyone would scream and come running here. He even forgot to lock the door. In one moment, wonderful pleasures that he had dreamed of for months came true. But even at the height of his lust, the fear crossed his mind that this whore might infect him. With

syphilis. Well, either way I'm lost! Wild laughter echoed in his soul: If only father knew! And mother, and Tsirla! And Saltasha! I'm like Jeroboam son of Nebat, like Elisha son of Abijah. A convert to anger...

He slept with her, but it did not satisfy his lust. A tremendous power he had never known before awoke in his body. Kayla hung on his wrist, clung to him, and cried out: "Don't leave me, my hero! My emperor! I love you, love, love, love! Spit on me! Kill me! Choke me! Tear me to pieces!"

He broke away from her, got up and stood. She lay naked on the couch, and he threw her underwear at her. Am I happy now? - he asked himself. Am I unhappy? It all happened so suddenly. It all happened too quickly, and with a prostitute who must have given herself to every drunkard, every scoundrel and leper. The watch he had received as a prize for memorizing fifty pages of Gemara fell and stood still. Bunem picked up the watch and heard himself say: "You came to my father to perform a mitzvah." Kayla's eyes shone with drunken laughter at me: "For me, this is the greatest mitzvah!", and she returned and extended her arms to him.

and

Is this love? Lust? Madness? Towards evening, Bunem went with his father to the Sochaczow Hasidim beit midrash. 59 His father was wearing a shtreimel and an atlas cap, and he was wearing a silk cap and a velvet hat. The father and son walked together, but the son remained in body and soul in the atelier, with Kayla. In the beit midrash, young men approached Bunem, spoke to him, but he could barely understand what they were saying. As was his custom every year, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel performed kiddush in the sukkah and handed the cup of wine to his wife, the rabbi, Tsirla, and the young sons, Shmela and Chaimke. Bunem performed kiddush with his own cup. But he blessed so quietly that his voice was not heard and the household members did not have a chance to say Amen. The relationship between Rabbi Menachem-Mendel and Bunem was tense, and the father did not hide his anger. He didn't even look at his eldest son. Bunem sat detached. He scooped a spoonful of soup from the plate, forgetting to put it in his mouth. Threads of fire stretched from the candle flames to his eyes. After the blessing of food, he stood up in a hasty movement, and his head bumped into a paper lantern - one of the decorations in the sukkah.

Usually, Bunem went to bed late. He did this mostly on Sukkot, when his father slept in the sukkah and he was the only adult man in the house. But this time he offered himself bed early. He laid his head on the pillow and his mind churned and spun like a churning mill. Bunem experienced everything anew: Kayla's bursting into tears at his father's court, the way she asked him, Bunem, how to get to Schmerl the

tailor, the things she said on the stairs, their meeting at the gate of the atelier building, her drinking to the point of drunkenness, the wild nicknames she called him, the kisses, the cries of lust, her pleading and demanding that he spit on her and strangle her. He had conquered her several times, and between one climax and another she tried to convince him to go with her to America. There, she said, she would be his mistress, the woman who would bear his child, or simply live with him and serve him. How she chattered! She swore allegiance to him and demanded that he swear never to leave her. She was not ashamed to boast to him and tell how much she was in demand in the brothel, how the clients always demanded her and paid especially high prices for her. She boasted about the pimps who fought among themselves to take her under their protection; she told of the other prostitutes who did not satisfy her and tore her dresses out of jealousy; she described with longing how the old millionaire, Sergei Davidovich, spoke to her gently, and how he showered her with promises. One moment she made Bunem feel sick, and the next - she ignited a tremendous lust in him. One moment she chatted about her dead father and mother, and about her fears of states of weakness and illness. The next moment she spoke of her fear of God's punishment and her anxiety about demons, ghosts, and other harmful things. She didn't have time to finish, and immediately a stream of dirty words burst from her mouth - profanity so coarse that even Kozak would have blushed. Finally, when he left the key in her hands and said goodbye to her on his way home, she ran after him down the stairs, sobbing hysterically and warning him that she would throw herself out the window if he didn't come back to her the next morning.

How could so many things happen in such a short time? Bunem asked himself, filled with wonder. A strong emotion he had never known before stirred within him. He wanted to erase this woman from his memory, and at the same time he missed her. Is this love? Is it possible to fall in love with a prostitute, whom anyone can sleep with for a few pennies? If so, then everything written in novels is nothing but one big lie. No. This is nothing but carnal lust of the lowest kind, Bunem concluded to himself. Well, kings, princes, and mighty millionaires kept prostitutes and lavished vast fortunes on them! Didn't the great Jean-Jacques Rousseau live with such women and let them throw away the babies they bore him? Bunem was restless. When he finally began to fall asleep, something woke him up. Could he go to Italy tomorrow and meet her there? Today he has invented ridiculous lies and excuses to explain his leaving the house on the eve of the holiday and his return just before the candles are lit. Could he do it again? No. It's impossible! Both his mother and his sister, Tsirla, suffer from tense nerves. Tsirla often has convulsions, her eyes blink, and she faints. Since becoming Mordechai-Zerach's daughter-in-law, she has given no one any rest. The mother has become ill because of her. Her body has become weak and thin, and she has been so nervous that the doctor has been forced to prescribe sleeping pills for her. Now she lies awake in the bedroom, coughing from time to time, sighing and groaning. She is very smart, his mother, and she cannot be fooled by flimsy excuses. What if he contacts a flawed and defective creature like Kayla? Well, and Saltasha?! After all, he swore an oath of love and loyalty to her...

I must sleep! I will lie down quietly and sink into Nirvana, Bunem decided. I will tell myself that I am an Indian fakir, and I agree to be buried alive. I must gather all my willpower, take deep breaths, slow my

pulse and surrender completely to Brahma, Krishna, or whatever they call their main gods. You are free, Bunem, free from everything that binds you to reality! You are re-pairing with Mother Earth, with the universe, with absolute infinity. Your purpose is the same as theirs. No harm will befall you, because you are united with the universe...

He began to doze off, but something - a kind of dagger - stung him from within, and he woke up in a panic. I must go to Italy and see how she is doing there - he decided. I abandoned her among the clay pots. She could die of fright there. Kliatshko will come tomorrow and find her dead. I will open the gate. I will find some excuse. And if not, then I am lost. So be it. The whole thing is madness. But perhaps madness is the essence of being? Perhaps the Almighty himself is mad, and the worlds he created are nothing but the frenzied product of madness? Not a word preceded everything, but madness. How is it possible that no philosopher has yet arisen who has conceived such an idea?

Bunem fell asleep again, and in his dream he saw the red kayla. He opened his eyes and saw that the sky was turning gray and dawn was about to break. He went to the window and looked out. The street was empty. All the shops were closed. Heavy locks and iron bolts hung on the locked doors. A cat crossed from one sidewalk to the other. Birds woke up with a loud chirp. Bunem hurried to get dressed. He had to sneak out, get out of the house before his mother or Zirle woke up. He opened the door carefully, making sure it didn't creak, and went down the stairs. The gate of the house was still closed, and Bunem went to the tent and peered in through a crack in one of its curtains. His father was sleeping on a folding bed. Beside him stood a bowl, and next to it a copper jug of water, for washing hands when he woke up. Bunem didn't remember ever seeing his father in his sleep. His father used to study until late at night and woke up before the rest of the family. And here he was, lying here in his small tallit, a kippah on his head and his eyes closed. A peace of childlike innocence hovered over his face. The rays of the rising sun penetrated through the thatch and cast a reddish net over his high forehead. Many times his mother complained to his father that he did not act like the other rabbis and did not strive to obtain a position as a rabbi in a big city, instead of being content with the lowly position of a teacher on a poor and miserable street. But his father calmly replied: "What does it matter where we live? The souls of all the Jews stood together at the foot of Mount Sinai."

Bunem quickly crossed Krochmalna Street and emerged onto Gnowina Street. It was a wider street, and so was the strip of sky above it. The morning sky was red above the tin roofs with the soot-blackened chimneys and the sloping gutters. The janitor of one of the houses was sweeping horse manure with a long broom. He stopped for a moment, leaned on the broomstick and followed Bunem with his eyes. He must have wondered what a young Hasid was doing on the street so early on a holiday morning, and where he was in such a hurry. An empty tram passed by on Grzebow Street. Jews are not allowed to travel on a holiday, and very few Gentiles lived in this area. The conductor stood next to the driver, and the two of them struck up a light conversation. The gate of the house at number one Twarda Street was

open. Bunem jumped inside, as if he feared the gate would suddenly slam shut in his face. There had been a fair commotion here yesterday. Now there was a holiday calm here. Bunem entered the foyer that led to the studio. I won't run, he decided. I don't want to get there sweaty. But he hurried anyway, skipping two steps at once. What if Kayla wasn't there? She might run off and take the key with her. She might even steal his beautiful suit, he thought, ashamed that such thoughts even crossed his mind. He knocked on the door, but no one answered. Had she run off? Had she hanged herself? Maybe a drunken tramp had come in there, and now she was lying on the sofa with him? Anything was possible, he apologized to himself to justify his ugly suspicions. Bunem pushed the door open. Now he quickly entered the studio. Kayla stood dressed on the threshold of the inner room, clutching in both hands the basket and bundle of things she had carried yesterday when they met at the gate of the house. She looked pale, disheveled, and unkempt. She probably didn't hear him come in, because she screamed in panic as soon as she saw him. Bunem asked, "Where are you going? Why are you dressed so early? What's wrong with you?" Kayla looked at him, completely confused:

"I don't know. I'll go wherever my feet take me. I had a terrible night. I wouldn't wish that on a hater."

"Weren't you sleeping?"

"I didn't close my eyes. I'll live forever if I don't die of fear."

"I didn't sleep either. I was worried about you all night."

"Huh? I wanted to light the gas, but I had no matches. I couldn't even smoke a cigarette. I sat in the dark and the moon shone above my head. I thought I was already in heaven. I wanted to go where even the emperor walks alone on foot, but when I entered the great room and saw all these things, I ran back. I got cold in every bone, like in winter, in the days of the greatest frost."

"Put the packages aside. It wasn't cold tonight. My father slept in the sukkah."

"The holy Jew? Oh, I thought about him. I sat and all sorts of thoughts went through my head. Bunemal, I can't go back to Yarma anymore. I can't stay alone either. All sorts of thoughts came over me, as if I had gone crazy. I thought you wouldn't come anymore, and the whole thing between us was just a dream."

"Kayla, I love you," he heard himself say.

"Buneml, all night I was just thinking about you. You stood before my eyes as if you were really here. I heard your voice. Take me! I am completely yours!"

And Kayla threw the basket and the bundle of things from her hands.

The original idiom: "The women come - and come - and come."

The surname indicates the origin of the teacher - the teacher: the town of Tomaszow, Lublin Province. The representation of the character of the teacher - the teacher and his family is based on autobiographical elements, the imprint of which is clearly evident despite the author's disguised tricks.

The author mentions three books of halachah that offer rulings according to the "Shulchan Aruch." Shach - the acronym for the book "Seftai Cohen" by Rabbi Shabtai Cohen (1621 - 1662); Taz - the acronym for the book "Turi Zahav" by Rabbi David Halevi Segal (1586 - 1667). Both books were published in the same year (1646), and their authors differed in their opinions. The third book mentioned here ("Pechi Teshuvah") was written by Rabbi Avraham Zvi Hirsch Eisenstadt (1813 - 1868).

Jacob rebuked his beloved wife Rachel when she cried before him and begged for a child (Genesis 30:2).

The sound of the name "Sheba" is similar to "Sheba" (an abbreviation of "Batsheba " - the name of the author's mother).

A collective term for bad luck and illness.

This is what the popular expression in Keila's reflections refers to: "Blot and milk" (blood and milk - full of health).

On this street is the Nozick Synagogue (the only one remaining after the Nazi destruction). Not far away are the Jewish Community Council House and the Jewish Theater building.

In his autobiographical book "Father's Court", in the story: "The Atelier", Bashevis - Singer notes that the famous sculptor and tombstone designer Ostschega is the owner of the studio at number 1 Twarda Street. Here, he apparently chose to use a fictitious name.

Originally: Holy Language.

This refers to the translation by Shlomo Rubin (Vienna, 1905), which was published under the title "Study of God with the Doctrine of Man."

The Sochachov Hasidism (סוכאצוו) was founded in 1870 by Rabbi Avraham Bornstein, son-in-law of Rabbi Menachem - Mendel of Kotsk. The choice of this beit midrash is one of the means of disguising the autobiographical elements embedded in the novel. According to "Beit Din Shel Abba", the author's father used to pray in the beit midrash of the Radzimin Hasidic sect.

Chapter Five

A

The snow fell for two days in a row. Then came intense cold. The frost cleansed the street. It covered the sewers and the garbage heaps, wrapped the balconies in a bed of white fluff, whitened the frozen roofs and cast a pale light on the sidewalks and the road paved with round stones. The window panes in Rabbi Menachem-Mendel's apartment were decorated with frost flowers. The Rebbe repeated what he said every year: These frost flowers are the reflection of the fig and date trees that grow in the Land of Israel. His salary was small, but the Rebbetzin did not skimp on coal for heating, because the household could not bear the cold. The oven in the courtroom was turned off. Outside, the sun was shining, its rays playing with the many colors of the rainbow with the light that came from the burning oven. Squares of light were cast on the yellow-golden walls, the whitewash on which had peeled off here and there, revealing layers of paint from previous years. The lions that stood on the Ark of the Covenant looked more alert than ever this morning. They shone with the gold of the manes that adorned their heads, and

sent red tongues at the tablets of the Covenant on which the Ten Commandments were engraved. The sunlight also sparkled on the glass windows of the bookcase and on the gilded letters of the book covers that had not yet faded and worn away.

As always, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel rose at dawn. He was already standing at the reading stand and writing a new addition on a long, narrow piece of paper. His new addition explained a complex problem that the Tosafot 60 had raised regarding Rashi's commentary. His daughter Tsirla, the engaged bride, had fueled the samovar with coals from the day before. All that remained for him was to strike a match and light the coals. Now he studied and drank pale tea - cup after cup. The boiling tea warmed his bowels and helped him prepare for prayer. 61 The early morning hours were for him the best hours for study. The members of the household - his wife and children - were still asleep. They woke up long after him, and then the women began to come with their questions. Sometimes Torah readings were held here, couples got married, or alternatively - came to get divorced.

Bunem woke up earlier than usual today, and Rabbi Menachem-Mendel looked at him with suspicion. This young man had deviated from the straight path. He asked too many questions, cut his sideburns, and apparently also trimmed his beard. He openly declared that he was not ready to marry like his sister. He said he would wait until he met a girl he liked. The tall young man with the pale face, sunken cheeks, and blue eyes had become his enemy. A wayward and mischievous son, a wild plant, a stranger in his own home. True, he had studied well. Years ago he had been considered a scoundrel and his name preceded him as a distinguished scholar. But Torah involves fear of God, and this young man behaved like a frivolous boy. He read inappropriate and forbidden books, drew pictures, and even published some stupid list in the newspaper. Gone are the days when a father argued with his son. The young man had already led his older sister astray from the straight path. Under his influence, Tsirla demanded that the matchmaking with Mordechai-Zerach, her son-in-law, be canceled. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel prayed every day that his son Bunem would not, God forbid, alienate his younger brother from the king and would not lead him astray from the path of Judaism.

Just as Rabbi Menachem-Mendel had given up on Bunem, so Bunem refrained from scolding his father for remaining stuck in the world of the Middle Ages, and for raising a generation of scoundrels and parasites. Bunem paced back and forth, putting on tefillin and muttering the blessings to fulfill his duty. He skipped words and omitted entire sections. What nonsense! He contemplated placing black boxes on his scalp and arm, and tying leather straps around his hand. His mouth murmured the words of the prayer, and his thoughts denied its contents. How can I thank God that I was not born a female, or a slave, or a Gentile? 62 What is the point of saying twice a day, “The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all His works,” when the whole world is nothing but a great slaughterhouse, and in every generation pogroms break out and the members of the supposedly chosen people are mercilessly murdered? And where is His mercy for the hungry wolves and the dead sheep that humans prey on?

Bunem stood for the eighteenth prayer and immediately flinched. Tsirla woke up in the meantime. She was wearing a robe and slippers. She was a year and a half older than Bunem, but she treated him as if she were his mother. She may have agreed with his views, but how can a girl stand up against her father and mother? They had matched her with the son of a teacher, a young idler, devoid of personality and intolerant. Such a person would never be able to support a family. He is capable of only one thing: moving over a page of Gemara and making the world tremble with prayer.

Tsirla and Bunem were different from each other. Tsirla was shorter than Bunem. She had a round face, dark brown hair, ruddy cheeks, and blue eyes. In character, she resembled her father more than a lama. Like her father, Tsirla was good-natured and believed in people. But in some ways she was different from her father: she was not as religious as he was, and avidly read the cheap novels published in the newspapers. Tsirla could chatter for hours about the heroes of these novels and their fates, although she understood that everything was nothing but a fabricated fiction. As a rule, she was prone to mood swings: one moment she would laugh, and the next she would cry. She also enjoyed singing folk songs and hits from the Yiddish theater. Bunem, on the other hand, was more like his mother. His narrow face expressed a resolute determination, mixed with inconsolable and hopeless sadness.

The brother and sister were simultaneously close to each other and far from each other. A hidden partition stood between them, like between father and mother. Bunem had been curious and inquisitive since his childhood, and was always looking for answers to the questions that occupied him: What is life? What is death? What is time? What is infinity? He read somewhere about the assessment of values and their testing, and claimed that this was the way of life that he would adopt. He would not consider conventional truths and would not accept existing authority in advance. Therefore, he decided to examine and consider everything anew, according to his own perspective. Early in his life, he found contradictions in the Bible and other holy books, and over time he developed a firm position that everyone had deceived him: his father and mother, the teachers in the room, the holy books in the bookcase. Later, he came to realize that secular books were full of empty rhetoric. Meaningless words piled up in them one after another, without leading to any real conclusion. What, for example, were the various writers thinking when they used words like morality, duty, culture, evolution, progress, history? Why did they use expressions like struggle, ideal, responsibility, problem, unity, method, solution, position, mission, status, conviction, recognition so often? And how do words like substance, absolute, design, monad, spirit of the times, attribute, basis of morality, categorical imperative fit into their writings? He went to the library and looked through the books. Saltesha took him to the circle The dramatic "Nightingale", and also to Polish theater. He heard a long speech from the writer Y.L. Peretz who spoke about emancipation, auto-emancipation, Jewish culture, Jewish Renaissance. He heard and saw. But how was he to act in practice?

His mother suffered from insomnia, and often fell asleep only in the early morning. So Zirla made breakfast for Bunem: bread with butter, a slice of cheese, a piece of salted fish, a cup of coffee mixed with chicory. Bunem ate, and Zirla asked:

"What do you say about Zbigniew Kaczynski? What a villain! Woe to Helena if she falls into his hands. Her husband the Count is just a miserable fool. A perfect idiot, who is a fool with a scythe."

"A man in love doesn't think logically." Bunem wasn't interested in the novels his sister was reading and answered casually, just to say something.

"Oh wow, right! How do you know that, Bunemal? Did you fall in love with someone, or did you read about it in a book?"

"In the book."

"What book? You've been walking around completely confused lately. You've also lost a bit of weight. Where are you going so early? It's cold outside. You should wear a warm tank top. Did you wear long underwear?"

"Yes. No."

"Do you want to catch a cold, or what?"

"I don't want to catch a cold."

"Yesterday the newspaper wrote that women in Paris had started wearing pants. Three models walked down the street wearing pants, and thousands of people followed them. There was such a crowd that the police had to disperse the crowds. Isn't that funny? Women in pants!"

And Cirella's eyes filled with laughter.

on

Bunem opened the studio door and saw Avraham Kliatshko standing next to one of his clay figures, polishing its snout with a thick file. Avraham Kliatshko, a former yeshiva student, was about twelve years older than Bunem. He was already married and had two children. He was also well-known. Photographs of his sculptures were published in newspapers - both Yiddish and Polish. However, in Yiddish newspapers, most of the photographs came out black and blurry. Avraham Kliatshko became famous as a designer of tombstones for the graves of assimilated deceased. The religious Jewish community did not allow statues in the form of a person to be placed in the cemetery. This was forbidden by the Ten Commandments. Therefore, Avraham Kliatshko carved deer, lions, eagles, and priests' hands raised in a priestly blessing on traditional tombstones. He also designed tombstones with hints of human portraits. Avraham Kliatshko, the son of one of the Hasidim of Sukhatsov, discovered Bunem's talent for painting and nurtured it. He was short in stature, with a hump on his stooped back. His head was adorned with a thick mane of black hair, a thick nose, and large eyes. These black eyes radiated a good disposition and hope for the future. Avraham Kliatshko gave Bunem a place in his studio so that he could paint freely. He also introduced him to Bene Saltesha, who was his model. Avraham Kliatshko loved to have a wise conversation with Bunem and discuss various issues from the Gemara with him. Both of them memorized entire pages by heart, and both of them studied for some time in preparation for ordination to the rabbinate. Now, when Bunem entered the studio, Avraham turned to him and suddenly asked without any preparation: "What is going on with some who say that Mordechai?" Bunem smiled. The phrase "And some say in Mordechai" is mentioned at the beginning of "Pri Magdim" and "Yora De'ah," 63 regarding laws dealing with the preparation of meat by soaking and salting it. This phrase is not widely known, and only those who have studied for rabbinical ordination know it. Bunem answered in a good spirit:

"'And some say that Mordechai' will remain as he is, where he stands."

"I fear that it will outlive modern civilization, the one called 'culture.' There will come a day when Shakespeare, Heine, and Max Nordau will be forgotten by heart, but many years after that, there will still be a young man sitting somewhere in the Beit Midrash who will study and memorize 'And Some Say of Mordechai.'"

"Israel will be eternal, huh?" Bunem replied. "If the Earth collides with a comet, as they wrote in the

newspapers yesterday, everything will disappear. Even 'And some say in Mordechai.'"

"It is capable of existing even on Mars," claimed Avraham Kliatshko.

"Not sure. Either yes, or no."

"Last night Saltshe called me and said she would be a little late."

"Why call? She's always late anyway," Bunem grumbled.

"Dear girl. What are you waiting for, son? For someone else to kidnap her?"

"Let him be kidnapped."

"Making something of yourself, huh? If I were single and she wanted me, I would go to the wedding with her today."

"She won't go to the wedding, neither with you nor with me," Bunem replied. "She declares at every opportunity that the institution of marriage is old and dead, that marriage is a sham, full of hypocrisy. I think she's right. The whole thing is nothing but a big lie."

"Free love, huh? And what about the children who will be born? When I get home, my girls pounce on me with such eagerness, as if they could barely contain themselves until I arrive. Father is here! Father is here! Children need a pair of parents. Not Bakunin's clever talk. 64 They need the institution of marriage, which has existed ever since according to 'and some say that Mordecai's,' and will continue to exist even after all the new fashions have disappeared."

"The fact that a lie persists over time does not prove its truth."

"This is actually proof. Time is the ultimate judge of history, science, art, and even social issues."

The door opened and Saltesha entered: a sturdy girl in a green coat, wearing a green beret over short, shaggy hair. Her body was short, well-developed, and ripe, her chest high and her waist wide. But her face was young, almost childish. She had a short nose, and her large, dark eyes peered out from under thick eyebrows that met above the bridge of her nose. Saltesha held a large bag in one hand, and several books in the other. She wore low-heeled shoes and knee-high stockings, and looked like a high school student, even though she had left high school two years earlier. Now she drew, wrote poems in Polish, and studied biology at the Folk High School. There, students were not required to have a high school diploma. Saltesha had been an active member of anarchist circles, even though this entailed the risk of imprisonment and even the threat of a death sentence. Now she entered the room cheerfully, and immediately began chatting and laughing. She smiled widely, and two dimples appeared on her cheeks as she said:

"Oh, it's terribly cold outside. The thermometer in the pharmacy by the Iron Gate shows sixteen degrees below zero. People are already driving in snowplows. Good morning, Abram. Good morning, Bunem. What a wonderful day! The sun is shining and the frost is stinging. Bells hang from the horses' necks and jingle loudly. That jingle still rings in my ears. Sometimes I wish winter would last forever. Warsaw looks so elegant in the snow. In the morning, of course, before you trample on the snow and turn it into a mush of mud."

"You once said you wanted eternal spring," Avraham Kliatshko teased her.

"What, did I say that? It could be. Why can't there be both eternal winter and eternal spring? If God is indeed omnipotent, as the rabbis and priests claim , he can cause Chanukah and Passover to occur together, for humans to be both men and women, and for Warsaw to be both London and Paris. Sometimes I hallucinate and imagine that Warsaw is in America, and I leave the Saski Garden and enter straight into New York. Tall buildings rise to the sky, and all the people speak English."

“How do you know it’s English?” Bunem teased her. “Maybe it’s Turkish?”

"Ah, I know enough English to tell the difference. In a dream, everyone knows. You, Bunem, are as mean

and narrow-minded as ever. But I am generous. If you really want to start painting my portrait, you can do it now. I have freed myself from all my obligations. This day belongs to you."

"Why not mine too?" asked Avraham Kliatshko. "He will draw you, and I will mold the lump of clay into the shape of your head."

"Yes. I'll give you both my head. You can share it. But it's too cold today, and I can't model like you want. What's this, didn't they turn off the stove?"

"The stove is burning, but the cold is coming in through the roof."

"If I were a glazier, and if there was a ladder here, I would go up on the roof and seal the windows. But I'm too heavy and could break the roof. Yesterday they wrote in 'Kurier Warszawa' 66 that the ladies in Paris want to be thin. Here in Warsaw they all want to be fat. My mother scolds me all the time and comes to me with complaints about why I'm not gaining weight. Fortunately, I can't gain weight, and I can't lose weight either. My body is as solid as a rock. It doesn't change whether I gorge or fast."

"A rare, precious body. If I had such a body, I would bequeath it to the Faculty of Medicine so that they could examine and test how it could exist without food. Such research could perhaps solve the problem of mass hunger and save the need for social revolution."

"Ah, today he woke up completely nervous, full of anger." Saltasha shouted. "The masses don't need such solutions. There is enough food in the world for everyone. The owners of the coffee plantations in Brazil threw thousands of sacks full of coffee beans into the sea, so that their price wouldn't fall. They wrote about it in the 'Kurier Warszawa'."

"It's all written in the 'Warsaw Courier.' But when your friends get together, they spit on the 'Warsaw Courier' and call the writers pen thugs."

"They are indeed like that. Pen thugs. Sometimes they forget themselves and deliver news that takes the mask off their faces. Karl Marx, the wretched traitor, called it a capitalist contradiction. In fact, he

contradicted himself more than any capitalist. Hey, men, I brought you something to chew on. Mom gave me half a yeast cake. She baked it herself, at our house. The cake is in my bag. I'll make some tea."

Saltshe did everything quickly. She threw off her coat and beret and ran into the other room that served as a pantry. There was a sink there, and next to it a gas stove. Abraham Kliatshko did not hide that he was in love with her. The other two painters who rented the studio with him (each paid a third of the rent) also said - doubt seriously, doubt jokingly - that they were in love with her. Saltshe kissed everyone. She did this because she thought it was appropriate for someone who had thrown off the prejudices of the bourgeoisie. She also preached free love, but remained a virgin. Saltshe repeated and told Bunem that she would give herself only to a man who would have the courage to live with her as a partner, and to commit to being the father of the baby she would have, if she became pregnant. Free love, yes. But promiscuity is cheap 67 - it is not. Saltasha cited Bakunin's "Revolutionary Catechism" and his ideas about free love and open marriage, but argued that if society does not support single mothers, a child should have both a father and a mother.

The other two painters, Heinrich Adler and Maurice Krabinsky, did not come to the studio today. Abraham Kliatshko was a painter and Bunem was a painter. In between, the two of them had the eternal debates about Zionism, socialism, anarchism, the purpose of art, the situation of the Jews in Russia, the institution of marriage, the status of women and their role in modern society.

Abraham Kliatshko sculpted Saltesha's portrait in clay, while Bunem drew one drawing after another, and none of the drawings resembled Saltesha. He tore up the papers and started over. He had long since decided to give up painting. No picture, even the most ingenious, could express the complexities of life and the turmoil in a person's mind. How could a picture reflect what he had been through in recent weeks? Even language, with all its possibilities, is too poor to express all this. But Bunem could not stop coming to the studio. First, he did not want to disappoint Abraham Kliatshko. Second, it was here that he had met Saltesha. Once he had even brought Kayla here. Now, for the thousandth time, there was a conversation about monogamy and polygamy. Bunem argued with Saltesha:

"And if you talk about the need to abolish all prejudices, then what about monogamy - the worst lie and prejudice? The idea that a man can love only one woman was imposed on mankind by the Christian Church. How is it possible that Bakunin and Kropotkin - both of them - did not have the courage to speak out against this lie?"

"Ah, he's already starting with the old topic!" Abraham Kliatshko grumbled, adding a handful of clay to

the sculpture he was working on."

Saltsha, who was sitting opposite the two as a model, took her cigarette out of her mouth and called out:

"Before you call something 'false,' you need to make sure it is indeed so. Monogamy existed thousands of years before Christianity. It still exists today among many animals. Pigeons are monogamous, and so are other birds. Besides, if the human race were polygamous, where would they find so many women for all the men? The truth is that polygamy is the worst form of exploitation. It is also unjust: if there are ten wives for one sheikh or one caliph, nine Bedouins are left without a wife. Not even one."

"Why not abolish the institution of marriage first? Why shouldn't men and women live together without supervision from the authorities?"

"This is what we, the anarchists, want!" Saltshe exclaimed.

"But what about the children?" asked Abraham Kliatshko. "Bakunin and Kropotkin, and whoever, can say what they want, but children need a father. When I come home, my two daughters are waiting for me at the door and running to meet me: Father is coming! Father is coming! If my Mirela had slept with twenty men, how would I know whose daughters are whose?"

"Ah, Klyatshko, don't take him seriously!" cried Saltasha. "He's not serious at all. One day he's the worst reactionary, repeating the words of the Jew-haters and all the other cannibals, and the next he stands before the world as the most daring revolutionary. Bakunin explicitly said in his 'Revolutionary Catechism' that men and women have the full right to live together, to mate as they please, and to separate as they please. The relationship between a man and a woman must be free. A married man and a married woman should enjoy complete freedom and - - -"

"If there is freedom, what is the purpose of marriage?" asked Bunem.

"Because most men and women, and I am among them, want to bring new generations into the world. They are not ready to put an end to the existence of the human race, as the capitalist decadents preach

in all countries. In fact, all these pessimists only care about themselves and their own pleasures. They want fathers and mothers to bring daughters into the world, raise them, provide them with food, clothing, and everything they need. Then these Don Juans will come and exploit the young girls. And when the girl becomes pregnant, the cunning Don Juan will take his legs and go away. And that is all his revolutionism. Is that right or wrong?"

"You preach free love. Not me."

"My concept of free love refers to the union of two lovers, who communicate with each other without needing the blessing of a rabbi or priest. When their love fades, they are allowed to go their separate ways, without trying to impose themselves on each other. Everything happens without the intervention of any religious or governmental authority. If they have a child, both take upon themselves the obligation to support him and do everything necessary for him. This is how Bakunin understood it."

"The trouble is that nature hasn't read Bakunin's writings, and nature has its own laws and its own quirks."

"What kind of madness? That one side will bear all the burden and the other will only enjoy it?"

"And what would a man do who truly and sincerely loves two women, three women, or even five?" asked Bunem. "In the novels I read, love burns only between one man and one woman. But isn't that one of those lies you would like to undo and banish from the world? Is it impossible to imagine a situation in which someone falls fatally in love with two women, or even more? What did Bakunin order to do with such a man? Send him to Siberia?" asked Bunem, seething with rage.

"Ah, forget it. He's just a boy. A real boy," cried Kliatshko. "A talented boy, but a boy. His starting point is to satisfy everyone's desires. But human culture is based on the obligation to set limits to personal desires and demands. And if a person is unable to limit himself, society must restrain him. This is the basis of the Ten Commandments and the legal system of every human society."

Bunem and Saltsche wanted to say something, but at that very moment there was a light knock on the door. The three of them - Kliatschko, Bunem and Saltsche - glanced inquiringly at the door. The door was never locked from the inside, and a stranger almost never came here. The two painters who shared the

studio with Kliatschko - Heinrich Adler and Maurice Krabinski - had a key. Kliatschko called out in Yiddish and then in Polish, "Please come in!", but no one came in. For a moment there was silence. As if the person who had knocked on the door hesitated or regretted it. Saltsche quickly got down from the chair she was sitting on and jumped to the door to see who was coming. At that moment the door opened with a soft creak, and Bunem saw a woman with her head covered in a scarf. Behind the scarf peeked a pale face and a disgusted, red nose. Saltsche must have recognized her, because she waved her hands and called out in Polish. After a moment, she winked at the two men and went out to the strange woman standing in the hallway instead of inviting her in. Avraham Kliatshko wondered:

"Who is this? Why did Saltsha go out to her without a coat? She'll catch a cold, God forbid."

"Really, I don't know."

"It can't be her mother. Her mother is a fancy lady. It must be their maid, Antusha. I heard Saltsha say that name when she addressed her."

"If you heard 'Antusha,' then that's their maid," said Bunem. "She mentioned her name to me a few times."

"Why didn't Saltsha let her in?" asked Kliatchko, doubting Bunem, doubting himself. "She looked frozen. Wait, I'll invite her in. They might both catch a cold."

Abraham Kliatshko acted with restraint. He put down the razor he had used to smooth the statue's forehead and headed for the door with measured steps, careful not to bump into any of the statues that stood there. But at that moment Saltasha returned to the room alone. Her guest had already descended the stairs. Kliatshko remarked:

"A short visit."

"Short, but important," Saltshe replied. "This visit may have saved my life."

"What happened?"

"They're searching our place. It's a good thing I told my mother where I was going. It was our maid, Antosha."

"How did they let her out?" Kliatshko asked. "Usually they don't let anyone out while they're searching."

"I can't go back to sleep at home," Saltsha said. "Someone snitched on me. Go find out who."

"I hope they don't come looking for you here," said Kliatshko. "If this is a tip-off, the tip-off probably knows you come here."

"Maybe you're right. I'd better go."

"Wait, I'm going with you!" Bunem called.

"Huh? As you wish. Let's do this quickly. Where's my coat?"

Saltsha and Bunem hurriedly put on their coats. Bunem also had overshoes. Kliatchko sighed:

"Really, I'm sorry. Call me when you can. I want to know what's going on with you."

"They won't catch me. I know, Bunem, you want to say 'I warned you.'"

Saltshe ran to Avraham Kliatshko, grabbed his head with both hands, and kissed him. In the process, she glanced at the sculpture he had created, and said: "Wonderful! Truly, a work of art! A work of art!" And she went back and kissed him again. "When will you come back?" Kliatshko asked Bunem, and he replied:

"Tomorrow, if they don't hang me." Saltshe was angry: "Why would they hang you for my sins?" And Bunem apologized: "I just said. So that what could happen wouldn't happen."

"Come on," Saltsha urged him, and immediately repeated: "Wait. I'll go out first, in case someone is standing by the gate. Wait five minutes, then come out. We'll meet at the gate of house number six. Be careful! Check if anyone is following me. If so, get up and run!"

third

Bunem arrived at the gate of house number six on Twarda Street. Saltshe was standing there waiting for him. She smiled at him and said: "No one followed me. Come on, let's go into some place. There's a small cafe on Gazibob Street."

They walked for a few minutes and arrived at the cafe. Bunem began to rummage through his pockets. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel did not give him pocket money, but his mother thought that a grown man like him could not go out into the street without a penny in his pocket, and from time to time she secretly gave him a twenty-kopeck coin. In addition, once a week Bunem taught a wealthy man, a young man named Lolek. Lolek studied at a gymnasium, but his father - a wealthy man - wanted his son to study the Bible, Mishnah and some Gemara, and paid Bunem a ruble and fifty kopecks as a tutor. This father was half Hasidic, half educated. He wore a short kapota with a stiff collar and a tie, and on Shabbats he would come to pray at the Sochaczew Hasidic seminary.

Saltsha noticed that Bunem was rummaging through his pockets and called out: "I have money!" They entered the cafe. There were two rooms here. In the front room stood a buffet laden with sweets, cakes and cookies. In the inner room there were tables for those who came to drink coffee and eat. Now, after breakfast and before lunch, no one was sitting there. The waitress approached them, and they both ordered egg cookies and coffee. Saltsha poured out her heart:

"How did it happen? We were very careful, and we were always on guard. They wouldn't be able to find anything with us, because I don't keep any written material at home. Father is the most efficient censor. He's always looking through my papers and checking the books I have. If he finds the slightest hint that the Russian people are unhappy with the ruling oligarchy and the gang of reactionaries who hold the reins of power in Petersburg, he immediately takes the pages and throws them into the oven, into the fire burning in the kitchen. I'm afraid someone has snitched. But who? It's very bad, really hell when you

start suspecting each other and fearing provocation. Until now, there have been no instigators and spies among us. Not in my time. Once, a guy was discovered among us who was connected with the Okhrana, 69 and one of the friends eliminated him immediately. Unfortunately, the Okhrana killers caught this friend and hanged him."

“He was a murderer too. He killed someone!” Bunem rebelled.

"Oh, what nonsense! A person who kills a provocateur is not a murderer, but an idealist. Shut up, don't start these conversations. I will never agree with you, and I'm afraid you won't agree with me either. I have long since come to terms with the idea that you are politically immature, and will probably remain so. Your pacifism, or whatever you call it, leads in one direction, according to which tyrants should be allowed to rule and win. They are allowed to eliminate millions of innocent people, and we are not allowed to remove even a single criminal from the road. I want to explain something to you using an image, but I ask you not to draw conclusions from it against our way: if a worm gets into an apple from time to time, it does not mean that we should stop eating apples. Now listen: a young man from Galicia has come to us. He intends to study at the University of Krakow. This guy speaks fluent German, Polish and Russian. He comes from an area inhabited by Ruthenians, and they speak Russian with a Ukrainian accent. But he learned Russian at the university. To be honest, I still don't understand why he came to Warsaw. Maybe they sent him here or who knows what. He got a job as an accountant here in a glassware business, which belonged to a lamp factory. He's a short, thin guy, with a thin voice. When you see him, you think he doesn't know anything. Not even counting to two. But he preaches murderous terrorist acts, which none of our thinkers would agree to - not Bakunin, not Kropotkin, not Stirner. 70 This guy claims that every terrorist act helps to realize the idea, no matter whether it is directed against the establishment or against private individuals. There is a group in Russia, I forget what it is called, that declares the need for such a struggle. To me, this is complete nonsense. What good was the bomb they dropped on the Bristol Hotel? After all, it is not a building that belongs to the authorities. I don't know why, but this guy seems suspicious to me. For some reason, I haven't trusted him since I met him. He tried to court me, but I told him I already have someone. He doesn't give up, and tries again and again. Usually I don't give my address to anyone, not even to the closest people. But once he met me by chance on the street, and walked me home. Now the thought comes to my mind: Who knows? Maybe this is his trick? I ask you: don't start arguing against our movement!"

"No, no."

The waitress brought the coffee and cookies, and Saltshe continued:

"I shouldn't have told you all this. But I can't tell anyone of our own. If it turns out that my suspicions were wrong, a situation will arise that will force me to flee on my own, or commit suicide."

"I'm afraid that one way or another we'll have to leave Warsaw. I have to report for military service in a year and a half, and I have no intention of cutting off my finger or pulling out my teeth to disqualify myself from service. Therefore, I'll have to go abroad. Preferably to America."

"A year and a half is a long time. I've already told you that I intend to go everywhere with you, as it says in the Bible. But I'm only willing to do it on one condition: We have to formalize our relationship. I can't tell Mom and Dad that I'm going to live with a man and have a free love relationship with him. For them, that would be a catastrophe. Dad isn't very healthy, and something like that could kill him. You know very well that I don't attach importance to the scripture or the wedding ring. But it's not worth killing your parents over such nonsense. It's clear to both of us from the start that if you stop loving me or I don't love you, we'll each be free to go our separate ways. In fact, I've told you this many times, but you always act like you've never heard it."

"I'm not pretending. But I have parents too, and for them, a matchmaking with a bride whose father shaves his beard and whose mother grows hair and goes bareheaded is like a matchmaking with Gentiles. A whole thing will start there: going to the mikveh, and who knows what else. They are fanatical people, but I love them."

"What was your plan? You only need to say one word, if the whole thing is too complicated for you. You know how far I am from wanting to force myself on anyone."

"Saltsha, I love you. I almost said, 'God is my witness.' But what kind of witness is he? I fell in love with you the moment I saw you. Actually, it was that evening at the Nightingale. I don't understand why we're talking about this now, when you have other worries on your mind. Ah, yes, because you mentioned escaping from Warsaw. If you have to escape, you can't put it off for a year and a half. There's no point in getting married if the Okhrana are looking for you. The deaf police might come and drag you under the canopy."

"What exactly do you want? The coffee is getting cold."

"The best thing is to travel now. But we can't travel openly, we can only sneak across the border. I can't tell my parents I'm going to America. In their eyes, it's a form of suicide or religious conversion. We also can't use foreign passports, if the police are looking for you. Either way, issuing a foreign passport is an expensive business, and you have to wait months to get the piece of paper."

"What would you like to do? Run away secretly, without saying goodbye?"

"For me, this might be the easiest thing."

"Buneml, I can't do something like that to my parents. I would rather die."

"I'm starting to believe I'm the anarchist, not you."

"If anarchism is irresponsibility or cheap lawlessness, as they say in Yiddish, then you may indeed be the anarchist. But to me, anarchism is the highest impulse to show responsibility towards oneself and towards others - both close and distant. With us there is no distance. Every person is close to our hearts. Therefore, even if I decide to leave everything once and for all and run away to America, I will not be able to do it now." Saltshe thought for a moment, then added: "I cannot go home now, because the dogs from the Okhrana are looking for me. I must quickly find a place to sleep. Not only tonight, but tomorrow as well, and perhaps forever. What, exactly, do they have against me? No real proof."

"If this guy from Galicia is a provocateur, as you suspect, he can also invent proof."

"All he can do is testify against me in court. But by the time it comes to trial, he won't be able to testify. There's only one person I can contact, and you have to help me with this. If you don't drink the coffee right away, then our match is over."

"Yes, yes. Who is the man? What can I do?"

"You don't need to panic and get excited. You're not taking any risks. This man is a professor of biology at

the folk high school where I study. He comes every evening, or almost every evening, to Pod Bliachem 71 - a cafe on Deluga Street, near Krashinsky Square. Our friends don't come there. A bunch of former Marxists come there, people who were frightened by the 1905 revolution and defected from the ranks. They've all come to terms with the existing regime, and even with God and the church. All you have to do is go there and tell him I'm waiting for him on Theater Square, near the entrance to the Opera House."

"What's his name? How will I recognize him?"

"It doesn't matter what his name is. He's very easy to recognize: tall, bald, with a pointed black beard. His desk is always piled high with newspapers. He reads all the newspapers he can get his hands on. He spends half his salary on newspapers. In my opinion, he's a little too dogmatic, but it's impossible for all people to have the same attitude. We don't believe in this kind of similarity and equality between people. Bakunin emphasized at every opportunity the personal uniqueness of each person."

"Stop quoting Bakunin!"

"There is something to quote from him. He foresaw everything in advance. He was a giant. Alexander Herzen 72 said of him that he was not born under an ordinary star, but under a comet whose brilliance illuminated all the ends of the horizon. Already forty years ago, maybe fifty, Bakunin predicted the split in the social-democratic movement. In contrast, Marx was a dwarf. You will see him the moment you enter the cafe. I mean my professor, not Bakunin. I wish he were alive now. If he were alive, it would not be possible to invent so many absurdities in the name of anarchism."

"What to tell him?"

"Tell him that Stasha is waiting for him at the entrance to the opera house. He knows me by that name. He doesn't know any more, and doesn't want to know."

"What time should I be there?"

"At seven. I'll be waiting for him by the opera house at seven-thirty."

"Is he Jewish?"

"What's the difference? He was born Jewish, but his father converted. His father was once a student at a rabbinical seminary. Almost all the students at that seminary converted to Christianity. Isn't that ridiculous?"

"To me, nothing is ridiculous anymore."

D

I can't lie to her anymore. I have to tell her the truth, Bunem told himself. That was the agreement between us. Never deny or hide anything from each other. But every time he wanted to tell Saltshe about Kayla, he talked about something else. It was cold outside, and they had nowhere to go. They ordered another cup of coffee and cookies. Now was not the time to tell the truth, he decided. Bunem sat silent, and Saltshe was lost in thought as well. I love her too much and I can't hurt her. Especially not now, when she's in this state, he thought. For who knows how many times he felt the need to tell her that no socialism or anarchism, or any other "ism," could cure human suffering. But he restrained himself and avoided saying it.

Strangely, in the middle of winter, one fly remained alive. A fly with a greenish-gold belly forgot that flies should die in winter, and buzzed around the lamp hanging from the ceiling. The fly landed on Bunem's plate, next to a crumb left over from the cookie. To him, it must be a mountain of food. Did he eat it? Maybe he was just examining the sweet crumb? The fly stood there for a long time. He must have been lost in fly-like thoughts. Does a fly have a mind? Does it have memories? Does it miss the company of other flies? Does it feel lonely? How is it that this one fly survived while all the others died?

Bunem's thoughts focused on that creature, which, according to all the rules of hygiene, should have been destroyed. After all, this fly was born in the garbage and carried viruses that cause various diseases. Like Saltshe, Bunem was interested in biology, and the two often talked about what they had read in biology books. Not long ago, Saltshe brought him a book about the life of the amoeba. How wonderful it is to know that this fly had a father and a mother, and that he (or perhaps she) was the descendant of

countless generations of flies. They all flew, buzzed, searched for food, and died, leaving behind future generations. If Darwin was right, this fly is the result of a mutation that occurred in another insect, and the other insect was also the grandson of who knows how many generations of its kind. Was there ever such a thing as the "ancestral insect"? Did life really arise through a coincidence of molecules? So, how were molecules created? And atoms? Recently, Bunem read in one of the knowledge sections of the "Warsaw Courier" that there is no longer any certainty about the claim that the atom is the smallest unit of matter. The discovery of radium led to a revolution in the science of physics. They even began to doubt the existence of the ether, which is considered the factor that guides electromagnetic rays. These days, discoveries have been made that have revolutionized the thinking of the natural sciences. Rays of light vibrated and flew at a speed of millions of kilometers per second. Now it is possible to use a spectroscope to determine what materials the stars are made of. In recent years, enormous telescopes have been built, which have discovered that the Milky Way is but one detail out of millions and millions of galaxies. Is space truly infinite, as Newton claimed? And perhaps it does have limits after all? But how is it possible for there to be a limit to the expanses of space? And here, in the middle of the entire universe, a young man named Bunem, the son of Shevah and Menachem-Mendel, arises, and becomes entangled in love or lust for Kayla - a prostitute who has run away from her pimp. This prostitute has gone out to do her business on Nizka Street, and he - Bunem - is now sitting with an anarchist, over whose head hangs the danger of falling into the hands of the Okhrana. Is this a kind of reality? Or is it just a hallucination or a nightmare created by the deity, as the philosopher Berkeley claims? 73

One thing is certain: he and Saltshe can't sit here all day. The waitress had already started giving them crooked glances. The fly flew away, and now it's pressed against the ceiling. It's a little warmer and cozier up there. Saltshe yawned, revealing two rows of white teeth. Fatigue and distress shone from her eyes. She turned to Bonem:

"What do you think, should we call home? Someone said that the Okhrana has representatives in the telephone exchange and they can eavesdrop on conversations."

"I don't believe it's possible. Don't say where you're calling from or where you are."

"I myself don't know where I'll be. My professor will decide that."

"How will I know where you will be?"

"I'll find a way to let you know."

"Are you really and sincerely willing to go to America with me?"

"Yes, really. But I can't do it without my parents' knowledge. Plain and simple."

the

Dinner was not yet ready when Bunem returned home, and his father had not yet returned from the Maariv prayer. Tsirla was reading a novel by Shamer by the light of the kerosene lamp. 74 She loved reading his books, even though she sometimes mocked his style and his Germanic Yiddish. His novels featured romantic love affairs and dark, scheming characters who tried to separate the lovers. The plots of his books did not take place in Warsaw, but on the French Riviera or Rome, and even in Switzerland. Tsirla used to say that reading Shamer's books was like traveling abroad. His mother sat in the kitchen, soaked in cooking fumes, reading "The Duty of the Hearts." Another book, "Mesilat Yesharim," was on her lap. In addition to these moral books, the mother occasionally read books dealing with worldly affairs, such as "Sefer HaBrit" and "Shvili Olam." These 75 books described distant lands, wild tribes, strange customs of foreign peoples - Chinese, Japanese, and those who live on the islands of the Pacific Ocean. A cricket sang from its hiding place in one of the cracks of the kitchen - a continuous song, telling a story in the language of crickets. From time to time the cricket fell silent, as if taking a break at the end of a verse, and after a moment began to chirp again. A Yiddish newspaper lay on the kitchen table. The mother and daughter had already finished reading it, and put it down to seal the pot of stew with it later for the Sabbath. In times past, the mother used to ask him when he returned home where he had been and what he had done. But he always answered vaguely, with a hesitant stammer, until she stopped asking. His father did not speak to him at all. Bunem behaved at home as if he already had a wife somewhere. Tsirla looked at him with a mixture of envy and admiration. He had accomplished something that only a man could do: follow the path he had chosen for himself. His mother continued reading until the end of the page where Rabbi Bahá'í proves that the condition of a person who worships God with faith is better than that of an alchemist who can turn everything into gold. She put down the book and asked in a voice full of reproach:

"Are you back home, or do you need to go out and run around again?"

"I have to leave soon."

"Dinner isn't ready yet."

"I'll eat whatever is available."

"There's nothing. Wait, I'll look for something for you. You naughty and naughty son!"

"You won't be in my hell."

"I think I will be. It has already been said: 'Cursed is this Giddal,'" 76 replied Shevah, the learned daughter of the rabbi.

Bunem looked at her from the side. He saw the thin nose, the sharp chin, the sunken cheeks. Her large, gray eyes reflected a strict, stern reflection. She has an interesting face, he thought. Something rare. I could paint a special portrait of her. Without a doubt, nature was wrong. Shebach should have been a man. From time to time, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel would come into the kitchen to ask her where this or that verse was written in the Bible. Sometimes he would consult her on the question of the kosherness of a chicken. Shebach knew better than him how to distinguish a broken or sprained wing. She was an expert in locating the bile hidden between the entrails of a chicken; she knew how to talk to women who came to ask intimate women questions, especially regarding the number of pure days they had to count. Now his mother said to him:

"Hands up, raise your hands. 77 Tsirla, put this down."

"The big Fritz can eat without a plate!"

"Do what I tell you."

Tsirla spread the folded tablecloth on half the table. She was older than Bunem. You could say she

almost raised him. She remained small and short, and he grew tall. The girls of Krokhmalna Street followed him with longing glances. The matchmakers were quick to shower him with matchmaking offers. He could easily have obtained a fat dowry: a thousand, or even a thousand and five hundred rubles, plus ten years of eating at the bride's parents' table. But he was quick to make it clear that his heart was not inclined to matchmaking. One of the followers of Sukhachev saw him on the street in a hat and a short coat. Not only that, the young man was also carrying a book of pictures and drawings. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel would have thrown the wayward son out of the house if he had known about it. So they kept it a secret.

The mother served Bunem a piece of meat that had been cooked in a stew, and on the side - a few spoonfuls of beans. She placed a slice of bread next to the plate. Then she went back to reading the book, and from time to time she cast an inquiring glance at her son. He grew and rose like an upright tree, without the evil eye, but he had deviated from the right path. At least he didn't chatter as much as his sister Tsirla, and he didn't have any complaints or complaints. There was a hidden struggle going on between mother and daughter. Tsirla claimed that her mother forced her into the match with Mordechai-Zerach because she wanted to get rid of her as quickly as possible. Tsirla even blurted out that if she committed suicide like the seamstress from house number sixteen, it would be because of her mother, and all the blame would fall on her.

Bunem ate hastily. He had to be at the café where the professor was sitting at exactly seven o'clock, and then arrive somewhere on Nizka Street, on the other side of the city. He stood up, and his mother demanded carefully: "Say the blessing of the meal. You are not yet a Gentile." Bunem sprinkled a few drops of water on his palms, and began to mumble. In this house, one only has to flatter the Lord of the worlds, and thank Him for the troubles He brings upon the people of Israel. In addition, here they praise God for the future rebuilding of Jerusalem in His great mercy and say Amen. Before Bunem left, his mother said to him:

"Wear a warm coat. It's cold outside."

"I don't need a coat."

And he hurried out. He ran along the slippery sidewalk. Hazy lights came from the gas lamps, but within them shone all the colors of the rainbow. A piece of whitened sky floated above the snowy roofs. Fiery embers came from the chimneys of house number seven. There was a bakery there, and the bakers were baking bread and pastries.

Before leaving home, Bunem secretly borrowed forty pennies from his sister Tsirla. He already owed her a ruble and fifty kopecks. Tsirla took this money from the amount she had to pay the tailor to sew her mohair. Having to go around penniless hurt Bunem and shamed him. He also saw it as a symbol of the corruption of Haredi education and a culture that raised beggarly, parasitic children. Here he is, asking to go to America. But where will Main take money for the trip?

Bunem ran and slid on the icy sidewalks. The newspapers said that in Berlin, Paris, and other large European cities they usually shovel snow. Here, in Warsaw, the snow piles up all winter.

He arrived at the café at exactly seven o'clock, opened the door and saw Saltsche's professor. The man looked exactly as Saltsche had described him: bald, with a pointed beard, and his desk was laden with newspapers and journals. The professor was smoking a cigarette and reading. A watch chain hung from his waistcoat. Bunem looked at him for a moment with a searching look. Here, here sits a man planning how to introduce anarchism. Bunem went up to his desk and muttered: "Stache is waiting for my master by the entrance to the opera house. Have her house searched." The man didn't even blink. Instead, he took his watch out of his waistcoat pocket, looked at it, and said aloud: "Five minutes after seven."

Only after a few seconds did Bunem realize that this was an underground ploy, designed to disguise the truth and show that he had only asked the time. Bunem sat down at a nearby table and ordered a cup of tea. The professor continued to sit in his place and read the newspaper. After a while, he collected his newspapers and put them in his bag. The waitress came over to him, and he paid and went on his way to Saltshe. Bunem sipped the boiling tea and looked around. The people in the cafe looked like revolutionary rebels, although Saltshe said that everyone had already come to terms with the existing regime. The girls' hair was cropped short, and the men had grown wild manes. One even wore a black shirt with a belt woven from strips of felt. Everyone was sitting in the cafe, planning a world revolution, each in his own way. Several of the boys read news headlines or excerpts from articles to the girls. Everyone seemed to be following underground rules, but their appearance and behavior gave them away. The black police car could arrive at any moment, and the police would arrest everyone.

Bunem paid and hurried out. He ran up Nizaka Street and arrived at the house next to which he had arranged to meet Kayla. She stood by the gate, wrapped in a scarf that covered her head. Only a pale part of her face peeked out from the scarf. She had grown thin and pale during the weeks she had lived apart from Irma. Now she had taken on the form of a servant. Her eyes lit up the moment she saw him. Bunem apologized for being late, and Kayla said: "Buneml, you don't have to apologize. I'm ready to wait for you all night. When you come, everything becomes simple and easy."

They walked in silence along the dark street. Tell her about Saltsha? - he asked himself. Hide it from her? Kayla had already pinned all her hopes on him. She had been waiting for him patiently on this cold night. Bunem was afraid that she would start screaming and crying, and maybe faint. I'll tell her later, he decided. They continued on their way, and after a few steps they stopped. Kayla held his arm, her hand trembling and shaking. Suddenly she said:

"Let's go back."

"where?"

"I found a hiding place, in the old man's warehouse. No one went in there."

"We'll be caught again."

"not."

Kayla began to tell about the baker who worked for him. His storeroom was full of slats, oven cleaning mats, and piles of empty sacks. It was warm and cozy there, because the heat from the oven penetrated through the wall. You could lock the door from the inside. The old baker had only one apprentice boy, and both of them were busy now: the apprentice kneaded dough for the pretzels, punched the bagels, and cooked them in a large cauldron to prepare them for baking. The old baker helped him with his work. There was nothing to worry about. A long time passed, several weeks, and no one poked his nose into the storeroom. Kayla said: I lay awake all night thinking about you. Oh, Bunemal, who would have believed it? I left everything behind, and now I am a servant. The old men, the baker, and his wife accepted me as I am. I am, as they say, completely naked. I have nothing. You are my only hope.

Bunem began to speak, and the words choked in his throat: "Kayla, I have to tell you something."

"what?"

A lump got stuck in his throat: "I have someone. I love her."

Thank God. She didn't scream or burst into tears. She stopped, they both stood still, silent and mute. Finally she asked:

"What do you want me to do? Go back to Yarma?"

"I don't want to lie to you."

"Well, that's how it is. Either way, I'm already lost."

They both stood for a long time in silence. Then Kayla asked in a trembling voice: "Take me somewhere. I need to drink."

The Tosafot are comments, questions, and explanations by rabbis. Most of them relate to Rashi's commentary on the Gemara.

According to custom, a person must go out to relieve himself and purify himself before praying.

He thinks about the three morning blessings: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who did not make me a nation; Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who did not make me a slave; Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who did not make me a woman."

"Yoreh De'ah" is the second column in the "Shulchan Aruch", and "Pri Magdim" is a commentary on the "Shulchan Aruch" by Rabbi Yosef Teumim (1727 - 1792). The book was highly regarded and widely distributed, and is included as an interpretive supplement in many editions of the "Shulchan Aruch".

Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (1814 - 1876): One of the leading anarchists in Russia and a central thinker of anarchism in his generation. Mentioned below is his "Anarchist Catechism": a collection of instructions for an anarchist way of life.

Saltsha says "shavings." She may be an anarchist who kicks against conventions, but that doesn't stop her from using the traditional Jewish expression.

"Kurier Warszawa" was a popular Polish newspaper founded in 1821 .

This is what the original idiom refers to: "the prodigal petroshka" (parsley, which is a prodigal: it grows like a wild plant in the public domain. Therefore - prodigality is cheap).

On Bakunin, see above, note 64. Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin (1842 - 1921) was a member of a noble family who sought ways of social reform. In 1872 he joined Bakunin, who had defected from the Marxist movement, and fought against it. But Kropotkin was the more moderate of the two.

In Russian, "guard." The secret police that operated against political opponents of the Tsarist authorities.

Max Stirner is the pen name adopted by Johann Caspar Schmidt (1806 - 1856) - an anarchist thinker, whose doctrine strives for the realization of extreme individualism through egoism.

The name of the cafe roughly translates to "under the roof" (in Polish: pod - under. białek - roof. The roofs in Warsaw in those days were covered with tin tiles).

Alexander Herzen (1812 - 1870): Russian writer and revolutionary thinker.

George Berkeley (1685 - 1753) was an Irish clergyman and philosopher. He argued that the world is a "collection of impressions," and therefore sense impressions can be the basis for conclusions about material reality.

Shamer: The writer and playwright Nachum - Meir Shaikevich (1849 - 1905). He wrote countless romantic novels, which were considered cheap literature ("shund"). Shalom Aleichem harshly attacked him in his "Shamer Trial", but today there is a tendency to appreciate his contribution to Yiddish culture.

"The Duty of the Hearts" and "The Path of the Righteous" are central moral books in the Jewish world. The former was written by Rabbi Bahei ben Yosef Ibn Pekuda in 1080, and translated from Arabic to Hebrew by Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Tibon in 1161. The latter was written by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (Ramchal) in 1740. "Sefer HaBrit" by Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu of Vilna is also a book of faith, because its description of the phenomena of the world is intended to praise and glorify the Creator of the world. In contrast, "Shvili Olam" by Shimshon Bloch - Halevi (1784 - 1845) is a Maskili book. Many believe that it is the first modern geography book in Hebrew.

The midrash is based on Rebecca's words to Jacob, "Your curse is upon me, my son" (Genesis 27:13). These discuss the question of whether a righteous father should bear the curse that falls on his son who deviates from the right path. The midrash places blame on a father who did not properly educate his son, and therefore he is cursed.

Do you mean the custom of raising the palms of the hands after washing the hands and reciting the verse "Lift up your hands in holiness and bless the Lord" (Psalms 113:2) before reciting the blessing "...who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to wash our hands."

Chapter Six

A

Max was used to everything going his way. But in recent days, things had happened that proved that his luck had left him and his world had turned dark. First, his plan regarding Sergei Davidovich's will had turned out to be a disgraceful failure. The old man's wicked wife had rushed from Kiev and taken him home. In the meantime, he was still alive. Second, Yerma had become addicted to a bitter drop after Kayla left him. He didn't earn a penny, and wasted the money Max gave him on Yish. All of Max's talk about only fools believing in women was of no use. Yarma missed Kayla and wandered the streets looking for her. He also accused Max of Kayla's escape. "She left me because of you!" he snapped at him angrily. This hurt Max, who had come to Poland only to meet Yarma. He was attracted to men, and fell in love with Yarma while they were together in prison. But Yarma was no longer attracted to male sex. He

had become indifferent to all the pleasures associated with loving men, and only wanted to get drunk and chat about Kayla. It seemed that Max had nothing to do in Warsaw anymore. But the police were looking for him in Buenos Aires, Canada, and the Soviet Union. In all these places he left women stranded. He could only enter Rio de Janeiro with a substantial shipment of live goods, to cover the advance payment and travel expenses he received there. Well, but this matter too It didn't go smoothly. Max planned to travel to the provinces with Yarma and Kayla. There, in the small towns, it's easy to entice females to travel abroad and raise a shipment worthy of his name. He planned to marry a few girls and convince Yarma to do the same. Kayla was supposed to play the role of a sister - his or Yarma's - and mediate in the affairs of the false matchmaking. But Kayla disappeared, and Yarma refused to travel outside the borders of Warsaw. He still hoped that Kayla would return to him, or that he would find her somewhere.

Max arrived in Poland with a lot of money. But staying in the hotel, traveling in carriages, and eating in restaurants were expensive. Besides, there was a swindle from him for Yish, and Max had to pay rent for him. Most of all, something had happened to Max himself. Something was wrong with him: his mental strength, his nerves, or whatever you want to call it. Max was attracted to men, and yet he was able to deal with women. For many years he was a prostitute who specialized in seducing girls. He would lead them astray, sleep with them, and prepare them for work in a brothel. Max prided himself on knowing female psychology inside out; that he knew how to talk to women and entangle them in affairs from which there was no way out. A girl who fell into his trap had no other choice but to become a prostitute selling her body. He convinced himself that he had magnetic power. Things that could not be explained logically happened to him. He only had to glance at a female, and she immediately turned on him. All he had to do was think of her, and he would hypnotize her with his thoughts. He had enormous conquests and achievements that he never told anyone about, because he knew they would think he was a liar and wouldn't believe him. Lou. Max convinced himself that his power of influence over women came from his lack of belief and trust in them. His masculine power stood by him and never failed him. He was an expert in courtship and lovemaking, knew how to satisfy a woman's needs, and did not pounce on her like those who were only looking for their own outlet.

Before Max left Warsaw on his way abroad, he had a lover here. One of many. But his relationship with her was more serious. He even thought about marrying her, even though he knew he was never truly capable of marrying a woman, because women did not attract him. This lover was called Feigele, or Pania Lepkin. Those who knew her closely called her Black Pania. She was as brown as a gypsy, her body was tiny, her eyes slanted like those of a Tatar, her cheekbones were high, her lips were full, and her teeth were spotlessly white. She had thick black hair, which she braided in two thick braids. Pania was Max's age, maybe even a little older. She was born in one of the poor towns in the Lublin region, and came here after her mother died. In Warsaw, she managed to get a job in a corset and lingerie shop, and quickly learned to repair and sew corsets, bras, and camisoles. The owners of the shop, Isidor and Ida Goldin, were elderly people, childless. The woman was very sickly. She suffered from kidney disease, and

her heart was beating. The husband and wife often went to spa towns - Otwock or Carlsbad - to drink mineral water. Fina stayed in Warsaw and ran the shop as if it belonged to her. It was a small shop, packed from floor to ceiling. The shop had corsets and lingerie of all shapes and sizes, and women came there from the most distant streets, even from provincial towns. Especially women came here who had to adjust what they bought to their body dimensions and shape. Fina became famous as a skilled craftsman. Other business owners tried to attract her to them, but she showed surprising honesty and remained loyal to her old employers. Her salary was low, and Isidor Goldin offered her a raise from time to time. He was even willing to make her a partner in the business. But her face claimed: "What for? I earn more than enough. I have everything I need."

It wasn't long before the husband and wife took her into their large apartment on Deluga Street. They even began to treat her as their heiress. Isidor Goldin wrote in his will that he was leaving her the shop. Matchmakers and just women who liked to arrange matches flooded her with matchmaking offers. But she remained an old bachelor. She would take one look at the candidate they suggested to her, and always say the same words: "Not my type." Sometimes she would reject the intended groom with the words: "He's missing pepper," or "He doesn't have a raisin."

Max met the black woman at the Yiddish theater. She came there with Isidor Goldin when his wife Ida did not want to or could not go to a play because of her illness (she had edema in her legs). On other occasions, when the couple went to Otwock or Carlsbad, Fanny would go to the theater alone. It so happened that she went alone to one of the plays that took place on Saturday evening, and Max was sitting next to her at that time. Fanny always bought expensive tickets that cost a ruble or ten gold pieces, and Max got free tickets because he was on close terms with the theater director. The play was so bad that Fanny allowed herself to say to the strange man sitting next to her:

"You piece of shit."

" Deep -throated filth," Max confirmed.

Pania glanced at him, thinking: He's my type. They immediately struck up a conversation, and it turned out that her hometown was close to Max's. They were even distant relatives, the kind of people people call "the same whip for horses and cows." That evening Max invited Pania to Hirschfeld's restaurant. Something small - tea and cookies. Then she took him to her house, to Isidor Goldin's apartment. After a long conversation, Pania confessed that she was no longer a virgin. She was living secretly with the landlord, Isidor Goldin, because his wife could no longer satisfy his sexual needs. Max asked her if she

loved Isidor, and Pania replied:

"Like you love a father. Not a man."

"You don't sleep with Dad," Max said. And Panya replied:

"If the father is a stranger, then it is permissible."

Max started kissing her, and she kissed him back and whispered in his ear: "You have a raisin, and even more with pepper." There was a room with a bed in front of her, but she put Max in Isidor's bed and said:

"What is not known does no harm."

"You have a verse for everything," Max remarked. And her face warned him:

"I'm yours. But I don't need bastards."

Pania was the best woman Max had ever had. But she didn't want to be involved in his plans, and she wouldn't go with him to Argentina. "Warsaw is good enough for me," she declared. He had almost married her. But just then, he did something that would have sent him to prison. During the months he spent in prison with Yarma, Max stopped thinking about Pania. He was ashamed of her for falling into the hands of the uniformed men, especially since the window of her house overlooked the prison where he was being held. Pania had warned him many times not to get involved in illegal business, and claimed that in her dream she had seen him sitting in the prison. Like Max, she too had hidden powers. She swore by the soul of her late mother that one day she was sitting in an armchair in the living room and her legs fell asleep. At that moment - she said - she glanced at a stool standing by the opposite wall and thought that if she could, she would take that stool and put her feet on it. And then, at that very moment, the stool began to move across the floor until it reached her, as if an invisible hand had pushed it toward her. Pania told Max about miracles and wonders that had happened to her and about many of her dreams that had come true. Max was afraid of the future that was revealed in her dreams. They all predicted serious illnesses, death, crime. After being released from prison, Max left for Argentina

without saying goodbye to her. Why say goodbye? He had long since decided not to get married, and Pania was not the type to be caught in a web of lies. And in general, he had no intention of returning to Poland, Pania's pig country, and he had never written to her from America.

Upon his return to Warsaw, Max leafed through the phone book out of curiosity and found the name Pania Lepkin. She lived in Isidor's apartment, from which he concluded that Isidor had died and Pania had never married. Max wrote down her phone number, and every evening he thought about the possibility of calling her. But he was attached to Yarma and the red Kayla, and did not want - as he told himself - to go visit Pania's ancestral graves. She was too decent for his taste, calculating and stubborn, and too confident in her hidden power and her dreams. To be honest, he was ashamed to call her after so many years. To just call like that, as if nothing had happened?

Now, after Kayla had run away and Yarma had sunk into the alcohol fumes, Max did something one evening and rang the bell. He expected a barrage of scolding and reprimands, and was afraid she would hang up and slam the receiver. Still, he said, "This is Max." And Pania answered in her usual voice:

"Yes, Max."

"I'm still alive," Max said. And Penia replied:

"Yes, I know."

"How do you know?"

"I have my own signs."

And everything was said in a normal tone, as if they had only broken up last night.

on

Usually when Max went on a date with a woman he did so in a relaxed mood. But this time when he went to meet with Fanny at Isidor's apartment his heart was heavy. It was raining cold and hard outside in the month of Cheshvan. When he left America he had not brought winter clothes, and now he was debating whether to buy clothes that he would not be able to use in Brazil. These days it was summer in Rio de Janeiro, not winter. The fashion there was also different from that in Poland. Here, in Poland, men wrapped themselves in fur coats, wore fur hats, wore woolen underwear, and wore overshoes. Max felt stuck, because he realized that he had miscalculated when he came here from Paris. He had planned for everything to happen quickly, as always. He had intended to find Yarma, to join him, to get half a dozen beautiful females, and to sail with them to Brazil. Max had apparently forgotten that in Russia and Poland everything proceeded slowly, and the implementation of various matters dragged on for a long time. 79 In his own way, Max fell in love with the red Kayla, and many times he repeated that with her and Yarma he would enjoy all the worlds: both the pleasures of sex and the chance to earn a lot of money. He planned to travel with them both to the province and see what could be done there. It was important to him to travel with them, because he did not feel like dragging himself through the mud-sodden towns of early winter. But Kayla's escape and Yarma's fall into drunkenness proved to Max that one should not be too confident in one's abilities. In fact, Kayla had run away from him, not from Yarma. And this was the first time such a thing had happened to him, to Max.

On his way to her, Max went into a delicatessen and bought her a bonbonniere. In another shop he bought an umbrella and a woolen shirt. Now he kept walking, glancing back now and then to see if a silent policeman was following him. He had lingered in Warsaw too long. At the Krakowski Hotel they began to look at him with suspicion. The police could have brought up a long list of old offences against him if they had wanted to. It was likely that the dirty women he had left behind were looking for him and taking care to get arrest warrants issued against him. So, although the journey was short, Max stopped a carriage.

The carriage arrived at the right address, and Max climbed the stairs to the third floor. He remembered a fancy house. But after New York and Rio de Janeiro, everything here seemed provincial, neglected, old and worn. On each floor there was a sand-filled shack on the landing. The apartment doors were heavy, tall and wide. Real fortresses. The door of the apartment where Fania lived still had a copper sign with the names of the deceased owners on it. Max rang the bell. Once, in those days, Fania would open the door as soon as he touched the bell. Now she let him wait. After a while he heard the sound of her footsteps. She opened the door without removing the security chain. Her slanted black eyes looked at him intently. Max confirmed: "Yes, it's me. Open!" She led him into the hallway and called out in Polish: "In the name of God, I didn't recognize you!" Max answered in Yiddish:

"I've gotten old, huh?"

"On the contrary. You look like a young brat."

"You haven't changed at all," he complimented her.

Her face had actually changed. She seemed shorter than he remembered. Her face had taken on a yellow hue and a flat appearance, like the face of a Chinese woman. The two thick braids had been replaced by a single braid tied at the back. Max entered the room she called "the living room," and he immediately smelled the anti-bedbug product. The furniture seemed heavy, old, and neglected to him. There was a sideboard from the time of Methuselah, and the Persian rug was faded and worn from use. He tried to kiss her as soon as he entered, but she recoiled. She went into the kitchen to get refreshments and lingered there for a long time. Finally she returned with tea and salted cookies. Max asked her how long it had been since Isidor Goldin died, and she answered:

"A year and a half."

"Is this all yours?"

"I pay rent for the apartment and the store. He left me the goods."

"What will happen to his money?"

"As it turned out, he had no money. The old woman's illness cost a fortune."

"Do you live here alone?"

"Who can I live with? With the Rebbe of Shinova? 80 If I let a woman into the apartment, she'll stick her nose in the pots and get into my bones. A man has to be my type for me to agree to live with him. I'm

not one to chase after everyone. Why did they arrest you, huh?"

"Not about reciting Psalms."

"You robbed someone, huh?"

"I thank God I'm not being robbed."

"Well, the same Max. Just like you were. You left without saying goodbye, and you didn't write a single letter. I didn't even know if you were alive. Where have you been stuck all these years?"

At first Max decided to keep his words to a minimum. But he had a need to boast and boast. She questioned him, and he confessed to her like a pagan to a priest. He did not content himself with telling the story of his exploits in America, and revealed what he had done earlier in Piaseck and the other towns. Panya's eyes changed their expression from one moment to the next. One moment they were sad, and the next they were filled with laughter. She measured him with a crooked look, full of mockery. Finally she said:

"I had no idea you were such a wild bird."

"I haven't even told you a tenth of my exploits."

"What else did you do? Did you murder your parents and bake them in the oven?"

"It's not. I've never shed blood."

"Why did you come to Warsaw? To sit in prison for all your sins?"

"I missed you."

"It's interesting to know if there's a bigger swindler in the world than you. My God, no one will laugh. You can fool everyone, but not me. I knew from the beginning who you are and what you are."

"And yet you slept with me."

"That's a separate matter. How come your nose hasn't fallen off yet? Guys like you get weird diseases and their noses fall off."

"I am completely healthy, thank God."

"Before you try to touch me, I will prepare you, as one does with a pot that will become prey."

"Agreed. As long as you don't burn me, I'd even be happy."

Usually, such witty talk heated Max and filled him with lust. But now, for some reason, he remained cool. What's happening to me? Has the red Kayla cast a spell on me? - he asked himself. Has my desire for Yerma captured me to such an extent? For many years, Max had been terrified of impotence with all his heart. When he read an advertisement in the newspaper about a doctor who cured "male weakness", he was filled with panic just from the words themselves. All the occupations he praised were connected with sexual powers. Many times he had decided in his heart that if, God forbid, his male power were to fail, he would put a bullet in his head. Kneidl was hot in the temple, and he was finished.

Her face went out into the bathroom. There was a gas stove to heat the water heater. Will she give me a bath? - Max asked himself. She must be starving for love and thirsty for a man's touch. But he's not ready for adventures of this kind. Well, I'm not the goat of the crowd. I don't have to satisfy everyone. Max took out a cigarette and smoked. He wanted to tell her to give him a drink, although he knew that Yish was putting him to sleep. Her face turned away.

"Because you're such a prey, you need to be rubbed down and trained."

"What did you do?"

"I'm heating water for your bath."

"You'd better give me something to warm up the pancakes."

"What do you want? The old man, may his right protect us, left me an entire tavern."

"Do you have any cognac?"

"Yes. And something to munch on."

Fanny went out to get the drink. Max got up. Maybe it was time to treat himself to a hot dumpling? Put a bullet in his head? - he mused. Well, maybe. But there's no need to rush. The grave won't escape. He went to the window and pulled back the curtain. From here, you could see the prison where he had been sitting for months with Yarma. A tram passed below, so close to the building that it looked like it would tear off part of the wall. Well, I've ruined my life, I've ruined everything, he told himself. There may be justice in the attempts of the red Kayla to get out of the mud. But where can he, Max, escape? And what will he do? Iron trousers in the workshops of New York? Go to Palestine to plow the hard rocky soil and inspect the grave of our mother Rachel? A man like him must exhaust everything that life has to offer, or perish. Fanny came in with a bottle of cognac and a tray full of cookies.

"Here, take it. Take a sip!"

"Let's drink to life together."

"Huh? Well, whatever. Oh, I forgot the cups."

She came out again, and Max took the cork out of the bottle and took a long sip. The drink burned his gut. He hurried to put the cork back in the neck of the bottle, and did it in the blink of an eye. Her face came in with two glasses. She filled his glass, and poured herself a third of a glass. Then she asked:

"What should I wish for you? May you conquer all the women you want."

"God willing, for your wedding." Max answered her.

"Wedding? Who will take me? Those I want don't want me. And I don't want those who want me."

"I want you," Max cried.

"Liar, scoundrel. You want my body, not my soul. Like that actress in the theater said. I've already forgotten her name."

"What did she say?"

"She said that... that... oh, I forgot that too. I have the head of a cat. She sang some song about human life and everything else. The years pass, and we don't know why or how. Then the angel of death comes, and it's all over. Here, what's left? Life!"

Her face tasted the drink and contorted. Max turned the glass to his mouth. "All that's left is a sack full of bones."

third

Max and Penny lay in bed. She had bathed and scrubbed him earlier. She had handled him like a mother

with her baby. Her hands tickled him, and he laughed like a child. But when she came to him in bed, he was seized with lust. It didn't help. Kayla's body was white, and her face was yellowish-brown. She had veins on her feet, and her toes were intertwined. She had calluses, too. He hugged her, and they were both silent. Finally he said:

"Well, you see, I'm no longer worth it."

"You don't need to apologize. I'm happy as it is."

"Whose bed is this, the old man's or the old woman's?"

"This is his bed. This is where he died."

They talked for a long time. Fanny told him about the store. She tried to run the business herself, and also look after the household. She thought she had the strength of iron. But she soon grew weak, and had to go to the doctor. He told her she was suffering from anemia, and prescribed iron pills for her. She had to get a maid, and she hired a young, divorced woman. This woman seems decent and honest, but Fanny cannot trust her completely. Still, she leaves her alone in the store. Does she have a choice? It is impossible to count every penny. The old man, to be honest with her, has accumulated so much merchandise that Fanny does not know what is in the store, especially on the upper shelves. She has to climb a ladder, and each time she finds items she had not noticed before. The old man had this madness: he would buy up entire warehouses - the stock of merchants who had gone bankrupt. Fanny explained:

"In this industry, there should be all kinds of people: women with strange figures come in. Until you see it with your own eyes, it's hard to believe that there is such a thing in the world. Some women have huge breasts. So big, that it's impossible to fit a bra on them. Others have chests as flat as a board, flatter than a man's chest. Well, what about those who have had surgery? A woman comes in as beautiful as gold, but she only has one breast. A tumor developed in the other, and it had to be removed. You have to know how to fit a bra for every situation. My employee doesn't know much about the job. But even her little help is good for nothing. I don't know if she's stealing. Even if she is stealing, I have no choice. Lost. They don't take anything to the grave. The old man accumulated more and more, but when his time came, he passed away. Who will I leave everything to? I won't have any more children."

"Why not? You're still young."

"Eh, not so young. You should start having children in your twenties, not your thirties. It's best to start right after marriage, at nineteen or twenty. At that age you don't think too much. You live and raise children. But I can't stop thinking about what would have happened to my shop if I had started getting pregnant and giving birth. Everything would have been ruined. In fact, I don't have a head for the whole thing anymore. When you start thinking, you ask what the point of all this is. Why bring new people into the world with new problems? Well, who would I have children with? With the angel Gabriel?"

"Can't you find a man?"

"No, Max. I can't. Sometimes all kinds of traveling agents, representatives of factories, large firms, come to my store. They show me samples of goods and start talking. Most of them are married. And if any of them are single, then they're not my type. They lack pepper and they don't have raisins."

"You can get by without raisins."

"No, Max. I can't stand a stupid man or a snob. There are some who are both. The ten or fifteen minutes that one of these is in my shop - even they are oppressive to me. He stands, talks, chatters, repeats the same thing a hundred times, and I wish in my heart only one thing: for him to go away already. What's wrong with you? Have you fallen in love with someone, huh?"

"Did I fall in love? No."

"You're in love. You're thinking about the other one. Who is it? You can tell me. I'm your friend."

"How do you know it's 'she'? Maybe it's 'he'?"

"Are you kidding or what?"

"It is possible to fall in love with someone of the same sex."

"No. Impossible."

I won't tell her anything - Max decided. But at that moment he started telling her about Yarma and Kayla. Her face listened and was silent. From time to time she coughed lightly. Finally she said:

"Max, you're just making things up."

"No. That's the truth."

"Who do you desire - him or her?"

"Both."

"What is this? What kind of crazy thing is this?"

"Call it whatever you want."

"Oh, Max. I feel sorry for you. If I were you, I would put the nonsense aside and try to live like a human being."

"I am not human."

"You are. You are a human being. Since you are not an animal, you must be a human being. You have simply driven madness into your head. Nothing more, nothing less. All this happens when a person lives

alone. If you had married me, I would have put you back on the straight path."

"Would you marry me? After you already know everything?"

"Yes, Maxxella."

"What, do I have a raisin?"

"A sack full of raisins. But if you continue to neglect yourself and don't take yourself in hand, you will lose. Remember my words."

They talked a little longer, until suddenly her face let out a light snore. He lay down next to her and placed his hand on her stomach. Her body was warm. Maybe she was right? - Max thought. Maybe now was the right time to become a decent, settled person? Well, but what could I do with her? Help her sort out the bras? Learn to sew corsets? Well, what if Kayla suddenly shows up and I take her and Yarma to Brazil? You have to remember that you get older. The days go by and you don't get any younger. There's a difference between a young brat and an old brat. Yarma is worthless. He's completely unlucky. A piece of matzah dough that has soured. He can't do anything except drink Yishma. Without Kayla he's completely ruined.

Max began to yawn. The thoughts tired him, and he fell asleep. Yarma and Kayla appeared in his dream as the heroes of a serialized novel. Kayla was the young lady Helena, and Yarma - Zbigniew Katszynski. They disguised themselves so that the Count, Helena's husband, would not recognize them. Police carriages loaded with policemen disguised as firefighters were running here and there. In one of the carriages a ladder was moving. Actually it was not a ladder, but a gallows. I must escape from here. To run for my life. If I don't, they will hang me! Max was terrified and jumped in panic. He woke up trembling all over, full of lust. He pulled her face to him. Some time passed before she realized what was happening to her in bed. After long minutes they both lay silent, until her face said:

"Compared to someone who declares that they no longer want to and cannot, you are quite a dick."

"Every now and then a miracle happens."

"Yes. I missed you. I thought about you all the time. That's the truth."

He knew very well that her body was being used by him to fulfill his lust for someone else. But what was the difference? The main thing was that this night had ended in victory and not defeat. But he realized that he had to think about Kayla Viarma in order to function. Now he began to speak to Penia in Spanish, so that he could tell her what he wanted without her understanding the words coming out of his mouth. Everything was tight and complicated, even though love and sex were not the same thing. Penia opened and said:

"I won't let you go away tomorrow."

"What will you do?"

"I'll tie you to the bed, and you'll stay that way. I'll put food and drink next to you like you would for a pet."

"Put a newspaper in too."

"You will get whatever you want. But here, with me. Not anywhere else."

"What would you do if I asked you to bring Kayla Viarma to me?"

"never."

“Just once a week. Do me a favor!” he begged her.

Her face considered. "Well, okay. Once a week you're allowed to go crazy. But no more." Ah, she backed away and gave up. That's how women are. When they love, you can get anything from them - Max thought. After a moment he said:

"I'll do the opposite. I'll tie you to the bed and put something in front of you to eat and drink. A little, like a bird."

"And who will look after the store?"

"You don't need any shop. I'll drill a hole in the Lloyds Bank vault and take out all the sweets. I'll leave you a bottle of champagne and a decent steak every morning. That'll be your breakfast."

"I don't eat steak for breakfast."

"Ah, I forgot this was Warsaw. For a moment I thought I was in Buenos Aires."

"You're in Warsaw, you crazy person!"

And her face kissed and bit his lips.

D

Hanukkah passed. The old people in the synagogue said what they say every winter: no one remembers such frosts and such blizzards. Bunem began to spend the nights at home. Saltesha disappeared. She stopped coming to the studio. Bunem called her home, and each time her mother answered and said that her daughter was not there. Bunem went to the Café Pod Bliachem several times, but Saltesha's professor was not there. Did she run away with him somewhere? Were they both arrested? That night, when he told Kayla about his connection with Saltesha, Kayla declared that she would immediately return to Yarma and Max. She dragged Bunem to the tavern on Powazkowska Street, near the Great Catholic Cemetery, 82 , and there she emptied a bottle of Yish. Then she led him to the house of the

baker she worked for, put him in a dark warehouse full of sacks of flour, and there she gave herself to him.

Now, with the turmoil of those days subsiding, Bunem stayed home at night. He realized that he had exposed himself to many dangers. Kayla must have told Irma who she had been dealing with in recent months. This thug could still come and shoot him, or stab him. It was also possible that she had infected him, Bunem, with syphilis. In addition, he had gotten involved with an anarchist whom the secret police had tracked down, and who had gone on her errand to one of those who would sooner or later be condemned to death. Abraham Kliatshko told Bunem on the phone that it was better not to come to Italy. Some mysterious figure, probably a mute policeman, came and asked the doorman about those who were going up to the Italy. It was possible that they would still search there. Bunem spent the evenings in the kitchen of his house. He sat there, looking through a Russian grammar book, or a book on natural science. He must flee Warsaw before he drags his family into all sorts of trouble and humiliation. But where will he get money for the trip? The family was preparing for Cirla's wedding, and his father borrowed money at high interest. In truth, his father would not have given him money to travel to a country where Jews work on the Sabbath, even if he had no debt.

Bunem did not know if Kayla had returned to Yarma, even though only a few steps separated his house from Yarma's. Rabbi Menachem-Mendel lived at number ten Krochmalna Street, and Kayla and Yarma lived at number eight. Frost had settled on the double-paned windows of Rabbi Menachem-Mendel's apartment, and it was impossible to see through them what was happening outside. The balcony was covered in snow, and the street was empty because of the severe cold. In a big city, you don't know what's going on with your neighbors, even if they live in the same entrance and on the same floor. Bunem had no choice, and he offered himself a bed on two benches in the courtroom. But he slept very little.

Worries and desires disturbed his peace and woke him from his sleep. Every time the doorbell rang, he was afraid that someone was coming to arrest him. He missed the red Kayla, her stories about brothels, pimps, and Yarma. He remembered the details of her drunken chatter on the night of their last meeting. One moment she was laughing, the next she was crying. One moment she was bragging that she was going to travel with Max to the "other America," where she would be the madam of a brothel for millionaires, and the next she was threatening to go to the Vistula River, punch a hole in the frozen ice and drown herself. The truth was that Bunem longed for both Saltesa and Kayla. In his delusions, he had slept with both of them. But what was the point of daydreaming? He had entangled himself in a depressing, hopeless situation. Even the matchmakers heard that he had strayed from the straight path, and did not approach him with matchmaking offers.

One evening, Bonham went down the stairs to get some fresh air in the yard (he was afraid to go out into the street, lest Yarma pounce on him), and stood by the dark entrance of the gate. Suddenly someone grabbed his arm and called his name. For a split second, he thought Yarma was attacking him. But it was Kayla. A wide scarf wrapped her around him, and only a small part of her face showed through it. Kayla called out:

"It's you! I caught you!" And a heavy smell of YHWH wafted from her mouth.

"Yes, it's me."

"I've been waiting for you here for three hours. I was about to leave. God himself ordered you to come down here. I'm completely frozen. A piece of ice." And she held out a cold hand to him.

"Where are you?" he asked, and immediately added, "We can't keep standing here."

"Come to me, to the apartment at number eight. Yarma is not there."

"Where is he?"

"Ride with Max. I'll go ahead of you. Wait a minute, then follow me."

Kayla came out of the entrance to the gate. Bunem stood and waited. Well, you can't predict anything. Neither the bad nor the good, he told himself. He went out into the street, his feet becoming light. For a moment he stood and surveyed the street. A purple sky, with the last of the daylight, spread out over the snowy roofs. Clouds of white smoke billowed from the chimneys on the roofs. Several shops had already closed. The doors of the other shops were half open, and the shoppers were sneaking inside, careful not to let the policeman see them, even though he had received a bribe. By law, all shops had to close at seven in the evening. The frost had thawed a little, and a few rascals, with visors stuck up to their heads up to their eyes, were throwing snowballs at each other. A guy with wigs, in a knee-length winter coat, was carrying a large Gemara book under his arm. The young man returned home from the Hasidim's shtebil, or the Beit Midrash, at number five Ganuina Street. Bunem entered the gate of Kayla's house.

She stood waiting for him.

“The apartment isn't heated,” she said. “But I'll keep you warm.” Those words heated his blood.

Up the dark stairs, Kayla stopped and bit his lips. He got drunk on the alcohol fumes that rose from her mouth. She opened the apartment door, and a cold breeze burst toward them from the dark rooms as if from a refrigerator. Kayla locked the door and bolted it from the inside. Now she said:

"Now you are mine."

"Where were you? When did Yarma come out?"

"I didn't go back to him. I stayed to serve at the baker's on the Rue Mille. I came to see what was going on here once, and the doorman told me that Yarma had gone and paid rent in advance. Today is my free day, like every Wednesday. Yarma went with Max. He forgot his cigarette box here, but he took the lighter with him. Are you hungry?"

"Hungry? No."

"I brought a bag of bagels with me. Come to bed. Don't undress. We'll lie down like animals in a den."

She dragged him, and the two fell onto the bed and lay on top of each other. Kayla wrapped him in the bedspread. He didn't even take off his overshoes. She began to twist like a spiral and make strangled roars and screams, like she had done back then, in Kliatshko's studio. Only now did Bunem realize how much he longed for her. A mighty power was proud within him. He felt like a lion full of energy. Oh, where do these mighty powers come from? - he asked himself as he broke away from her after a turbulent jolt of carnal lust.

"You didn't go back to Yarma?"

"I told you not to."

"Why did you hide and not reveal anything?"

"I only have one day off from work a week. If you have another, what's the big deal? But on Wednesdays I waited for you several times by the gate, even though I was afraid someone would recognize me. I wanted to forget you, but I couldn't. As I lay in the kitchen, I saw you coming towards me and heard your voice. Are you a sorcerer or what?"

"Yes, I am a sorcerer."

"I thought about everything. I lay awake at night until the daylight faded in the window. The old baker and his wife come home late from the bakery. They pour a pile of money on the table and count the bills until two in the morning. The kitchen is as hot as an oven, and the mice jump and run around even though there are three cats in the house. The old men let me sleep until late. I fell asleep and talked to you in my dream. I begged you to come back. My dead mother came to me in a shroud and spoke to me as I am speaking to you now. 'Kayla,' my mother said, 'if he does not want you as his wife, be his maid. Wash his feet and drink the water.' 83 Those were her words. I got out of bed and went looking for you."

"You haven't had anyone this whole time?"

"No one has touched me with even a little finger. Who? The old baker is sick. His stomach is swollen like a drum, with scars from three surgeries. His apprentice has a wife and three children. They know what I am, because I live there without a permit. With a yellow passport you can't register and get a residence permit. I threw this passport down the toilet. I want to go to America with you. At least she's pretty, huh? I mean your bride."

"Beautiful, smart and educated."

"I will be her maid and carry her shopping basket. I will take care of your children..."

After a moment, Kayla got out of bed and lit a fire in the kitchen. There was a bundle of toothpicks from the old days, a piece of kindling wood, and some coal. There was also a box of matches. Kayla lit a fire on the stove and lit the kerosene lamp. Many apartments already had gas lighting, but here, like in Rabbi Menachem-Mendel's apartment, they still used kerosene lamps. Kayla put a kettle of water on the stove to make tea. Bunem watched her as she busied herself in the kitchen. He had a strange feeling, as if she were his wife. He drank the hot tea, still in his coat and overshoes, and Kayla handed him a handful of prunes that had been left in the apartment - a relic of the previous household. She took off her scarf, covered Bunem's shoulders, and said:

"I would like this night to last forever, and you to stay with me forever. I would become a pure and holy daughter of Israel. I would forget everything that used to be."

"Impossible to forget."

"Maybe. I was starting to forget, but lame Max came and woke everything up again. Where are they both dragging themselves in this cold? Max has maybe a dozen females in the surrounding towns. He has children too. He'll drag Yarma into such a quagmire that even seven pairs of oxen won't be able to pull him out. As soon as I saw him, I told Yarma that he was our angel of death. When I saw you sitting in your kitchen reading a book, and even earlier, when you entered the courtroom and picked up the inkwell, I thought to myself: This is an angel from heaven."

"Kayla, I'm not an angel at all."

"In my eyes you are an angel. If you were a few years younger and I were a little older, I could have been your mother. I wanted to have a child, but Yarma said: What for? So that my son would have a criminal father? I told him: You don't have to be a criminal. Look for a job, or do some trade. But what do they say? - The forest attracts bears. I would like to have a child with you, a blond boy with blue eyes - - -"

"For what purpose? To bring new trouble into the world?"

"A child is not a problem. My mother used to say: 'Every tree wants to bear fruit.'"

Originally: "filth with a seal" (a seal is a seal made of wax or lead). The translation is based on the fact that a seal is imprinted on a diploma (certificate).

The original idiom: "זאבן וערן פארצויגן אין דר לאנג באנק אין" (literal translation: Things are stretched out and lingering on the long bench).

A town that had a Hasidic court that belonged to one of the branches of the Sanz Hasidism.

In many towns, people raised goats for household needs, and the community kept a goat ("the community goat") that was used to breed the goats.

The large Catholic cemetery is known for several tombstones of sculptural value.

This is a popular version, full of sensual vitality, of the well-known saying: "The Lord struggles in the dust of their feet [of the wise], and the Lord thirstily drinks their words" (Avot 1:4).

Chapter Seven

A

Avraham Kliatshko conveyed to Bunem the news that Saltesha had been arrested and was being held in the political prisoners' wing of the fortress. One evening, when Bunem returned from a meeting with Kayla, his sister Cirla informed him that a policeman was looking for him. In that instant, everything became clear to him: the secret police had learned of his connection with Saltesha. If he did not escape, he would be arrested tonight. He did not even have time to say goodbye to his parents. He kissed his sister on the forehead and said:

"Zirle, hi!"

"Where are you running to?" asked Tsirla.

"Wherever the eyes see and the feet carry."

At night, Bunem was with Kayla in her old apartment at number 8 Krochmalna Street. The apartment was neglected. Mice had escaped from the cold outside and taken possession of the apartment. Kayla was preparing to wash the floors in the evening. Purim was approaching, but it was still bitterly cold outside. Thank God, the gate was open. Bunem went in, climbed the dark stairs, and went to the door. From outside, he heard Kayla scrubbing the floors with a brush. He started knocking on the door and called out: "Kayla, it's me! Kayla, open up!" It turns out that she recognized his voice, because she immediately opened the door. She stood before him barefoot, her dress rolled down to her bare knees, and looked at him in panic:

"Mom, what happened?"

"Let me in!"

She brought him in, and Bunem called out breathlessly:

"Kayla, I have to escape Warsaw!"

"Why, what happened?"

"The secret police are looking for me. Come with me."

"When? Where?"

"Right now! To America."

"My mother! My mother! My mother!"

"We don't even have a minute! How much money do you have left?"

"I have everything. About three hundred rubles. The old man gave me money in advance. Six months' rent."

"We must escape."

“You didn’t take anything with you?” Kayla asked.

"not."

"Where will we run away to at night? Let's wait until morning."

"We must leave Warsaw tonight."

"The elders didn't know where I had disappeared to."

"Write them a letter."

"I can't go away like this, with only a shirt on."

"Come on! Hurry! Before they lock the gate!"

Kayla was silent for a long moment, and finally said:

"God willing. What time is it, huh?"

"A quarter to ten."

"Well."

Kayla pulled down the hem of her dress and began packing a small bundle with some food, clean underwear, a bar of soap, a comb. Bunem urged her:

"I'll go out first. It's not good for us to be seen together."

"Where will you wait for me?"

"On the corner of Gnoina Street."

"Wait. Tonight is like Yom Kippur to me," Kayla said.

"Hurry up. They'll be locking the gate soon."

"Yes, Bonamel. Everything is from God."

He went out into the street and began to walk towards Gnoina Street. At first he had sworn that he would never use Kayla's impure money, her money, but fate had deceived him and forced him to cancel all his resolutions and vows. He knew very well what was implied by using her money for the trip. From now on, his whole life would be bound to her. Well, anything was better than sitting in Pawiak prison or

in a fortress, awaiting the gallows or deportation to the Siberian steppes. How could he prove that he was not one of Saltasha's friends, the anarchists? In Russia, they poured out all their anger and rage on the Jews, and brought innocent people to the gallows. Just don't arrest me here, on the street, he begged in his heart to the invisible forces, whose existence he had hitherto denied. He choked with fear. His legs gave way and got tangled together. The full moon was in the sky - a sign that the first day of Adar had arrived. In two weeks, Purim will be here, and in six weeks, Passover. This winter was the longest he could remember. The Book of Life Shlomo took place in the few months since Kayla came to his father, and he showed her where Shmerl the tailor lived. Bunem stood and looked out at the street, knowing that this was the last time he would see him. Will I remember everything? Will I forget? He didn't even say goodbye to his parents and his siblings Shmel'ah and Haymaka.

Bunem was shocked by the situation he found himself in and by the speed with which words, plans and thoughts became reality. No. This was no accident. A deliberate hand led him, the hand of Providence. But why did Providence choose such an end for him? Is this a punishment for his doubts and sins? The "Asherah" prayer - which every Jew says twice a day - states that God is a merciful Father who answers the requests of those who fear Him, who serve Him in truth and sincerity. So why did his parents deserve such punishment? Why do devout, God-fearing Jews suffer hunger and deprivation and die young? Yes. There is Providence, Bunem told himself. But it is not merciful. It does not even pity tender, innocent children. All the wars, plagues and famines would not have happened without the will of Providence. Baylis would not have been imprisoned at 84 if Heaven had not willed it. All the Crusades, the bloodshed, the expulsion decrees, and the various pogroms would not have happened against the will of God. The Jews who were tortured in the dungeons of the Inquisition had no choice between good and evil. They were tortured until they died in agony. The sanctification of God? For what and for what purpose does Almighty God need people to give their lives for Him? Why does Almighty God demand that children jump into flames for Him?

A heavy heartache weighed on Bonam and stirred in him a spirit of rebellion. God exists, he concluded, but I will not serve him! I will not keep any of his commandments. I will not beg him. If he wants to kill me, let him. I will live in the mud, absorb shame and humiliation, and ask him for no favors! Finally he saw Kayla coming. She was carrying a basket and a tied package in her hands, her head was wrapped in a kerchief. Now she looked like a devout Jewess from the provinces. Not at all what she really was.

Well, somewhere out there, in a small cell in the prison fortress, Saltshe sat awaiting her trial. She was put on trial for her desire to save humanity, to introduce justice and moral purity in a slaughterhouse that was teeming with garbage...

on

Bunem stood at a loss next to Kayla, and for a moment could not decide what to do. Should he go with her to the large train station and try to get a ticket to Mlava, near the border? Should he go with her to the tavern on Twarda Street and spend the night there? He had left his hat and his short suit in the tavern. What was the point of going to America in a long hood? Even devout Jews shortened their clothes when they went to America. Yes. He had to go with her to the tavern. As he walked, he imagined the chaos and panic that now prevailed in his house. If only there had been a telephone there, he could have called, talked to the parents, and explained to them what things meant. Bunem remembered the decree requiring parents to pay a fine of three hundred rubles if their son evaded military service. Where would his parents get such a sum? Well, but he could not stay in Warsaw and fall into the hands of the secret police. It was already late. They had started locking the doors of the houses. Bonham was not in the habit of visiting the atelier late at night. The doorman did not know him. He did not know whether they would open the gate for him and let him in. Especially now, with a strange woman accompanying him. He put his hands in his pockets, fumbled and found a penny. That was all he had. Both he and Kayla walked along Grzebow Street on their way to Twarda. All the shops were closed. Dim shadows floated over the city, which no lantern could dispel, especially since the glass coverings of the street lamps were covered with a layer of frost.

He must have been walking too fast, because Kayla couldn't catch up with him. She stopped every now and then, breathing heavily. Only now did he reveal to her why he had to escape. His girlfriend, Saltsha, was an anarchist. They put her in prison. She was locked up in the citadel. Now they were looking for him. Kayla was surprised:

"I thought they had already killed all the rebels."

"There's always someone left. Besides, during the 1905 revolution she was still a little girl."

“What does she want, for everyone to be equal?” Kayla wondered.

"more or less."

"Some of their friends would come to us sometimes when we had guests. They would rip all of Auntie's

bed linens, cut up the pillows, and scatter the feathers. Then they would grab chairs, cushions, and dinnerware, and throw them out the window."

"Yes, I know. But that was done by socialists, not anarchists."

“Why did you get yourself into this group?” Kayla asked.

Bunem didn't answer her. It would be too long before she understood. He was too cold to speak. He had never agreed with their opinions, but he also couldn't connect with a bourgeois girl who was looking for a groom, wanted to get married and have children. He had nothing to talk about with girls of that kind. With the left-wing girls he could argue, fight about something. They were interested in literature and art, and sometimes even in science. Even someone like Kayla interested him more than some bourgeois good girl. At least she had been through something and done something in her life. She gave voice to those who had peered into the depths of the abyss. Kayla had often mentioned death and said moving words that provoked thought. Now she took his arm and walked with him. She didn't even ask where he was taking her. Those who had come out of the sewers were not affected by the bourgeois fears and barriers of the decent young women, who only sought comfort and luxury. Suddenly Kayla asked:

"Don't you know when they'll release her?"

"I don't know anything."

"What if they release her and she comes to America?"

"No matter what, we will always remain friends."

They reached the gate of the house at number one, Twarda Street, and he rang the bell. Another couple was waiting at the gate. They must have returned home after a theater performance. The porter opened the gate and let all four of them in. Bunem put the one penny he had found in his pocket next to him. From here he could see the glass roof of the studio. No light shone through the windows, and Bunem realized that no one was in the studio. He and Kayla went up the stairs to the fifth floor. Bunem took the

bundles from Kayla and opened the door. A gust of cold air blew from inside the studio. Kliatshko only occasionally turned on the stove. Bunem led Kayla through the sculptures—the strange shapes, as she called them—and they both entered the inner room where the sofa stood. Now he felt hungry. Kayla seemed to read his thoughts and said, "I brought something to eat with me."

He didn't turn on the light, because he didn't want the doorman downstairs to see the light and realize that someone was in the atelier. Since Saltasha has been in prison, the atelier has not been a safe place. All the doormen have connections with the police. They have to report to the chief of police about everything that happens in the building. Kayla took half a loaf of bread, a few pretzels, and a slice of cheese from her bundle, and they both sat in the dark and ate. A warm closeness radiated from her, as if she were his wife. It was hard to believe that she had rolled around in garbage heaps, in whorehouses, and slept with thieves, murderers, drunkards, and syphilis sufferers. Kayla said:

"The elders will see that I didn't come and won't know where I am. They'll think I went back there. You know where. I also owe them money. They paid me an advance of six months' salary. Now they'll probably say: A promiscuous woman will always remain a promiscuous woman."

"Let them say."

"Buneml, that doesn't suit my character."

"What do you want to do? Send them the money from America."

"Oh, Bunemal, I've been through hell. But, like this, it's hard for me to sort out these good people. And what will Yerma say when he comes back and sees that I was in the apartment? We're not divorced. We're still husband and wife."

"Yes, I know. If something is stopping you, tell me. I don't want to force anything on you."

"Buneml, I'm not tied to anything here, and nothing is stopping me. Yerma is as dead to me. But I'm afraid I'll lose you there, in faraway America. They told me what there is there: millions and millions of

people. You walk with someone on the street, and suddenly he disappears and is no more. As if the earth has swallowed him. To get lost on the road there and lose direction is worse than death."

"Kyla, I will not leave you. I am traveling at your expense. The money is yours. Without you I would have fallen into the hands of the Greeks. 85 If they had captured me, I would not have escaped them alive."

"Buneml, I will be faithful to you. I will kiss every place your foot steps. From the moment I saw you for the first time, on the eve of Sukkot, my heart told me that you would save me and get me out of the mud. I don't want you to marry me. How is that possible? I'm not divorced, and you have a girlfriend. But I want to be your maid, your cook, your laundress, everything. I also want... I'd better keep quiet."

"A boy, huh? A boy like that is considered a bastard. Not only among the Jews, but also among the Gentiles."

"A child is a child."

"Such a child pays for the sins of his parents."

"In America, they don't check anyone's tizzits. In America, you don't know what's cooking in someone else's pot," Kayla argued. She opened her bundle and took out a bottle of Yish. "Bun, I have to take a sip."

"If you must, then you must."

"Drink too."

She took a few long sips. Then she placed the bottle in front of his mouth. He hesitated for a moment, and began to drink. They both lay down in their clothes on the narrow sofa. It was cold here, and they covered themselves with his long winter coat, Kayla's coat, and her sweater. Earlier, in the apartment at number 8 Krochmalna Street, they had spent a few hours together. But his desire for her had

reawakened in him. Her hot body stirred him. She spoiled him with love-treats he had never known, nor had he ever heard of. She called him funny names. She cried out over and over that she would like to die for him, to be the atonement for his little fingernail, a trample for his feet. Then she came back and mentioned Saltesha. Saltesha would be the mistress of the house, and she - Kayla - would be a slave; she would carry the shopping basket after her to the market. Over and over again Kayla reminded him of her miserable condition, of how worthless a Lumennik she was, unworthy of their relationship.

"My beloved, my God, my ruler, you should spit on me. If I fall behind in America, throw me to the dogs."

"What kind of talk is this?" Bunem got angry.

"You are holy, pure, and I am just a piece of trash. It is disgusting to eat bread with me."

Her words embarrassed him. However, they aroused in him a strong attraction to her. He had lost everything: Saltesha, his parents, Cirla and the younger siblings, Warsaw. He had nothing left but her, this special and strange character.

third

Bunem was sleeping a deep, heavy sleep, the kind that comes from despair and unfulfilled longing. When he opened his eyes, he saw that the day was beginning to turn gray. They had to leave the studio before Avraham Kliatshko arrived. Kayla lay next to him, and in the dim light of the winter dawn her face looked older, grayer, and somehow - withered and withered before their time. Bunem entered the large hall where the statues stood: clay statues, stone statues, plaster casts - corpses on which an artist's hand had forced a human form. In one corner lay a bundle of papers rolled up like a scroll. These were his, Bunem's, drawings. He wasn't even curious to look at them again. He had long since decided that it was impossible to express in painting the frightened thrill of human life. He even doubted whether words could do it. Well, can you express everything? Even if one day someone were to read what he went through, about his family, and what he did in his life - would that help? No artistic expression can sweeten the bitter fate of a person, the suffering he experienced, the humiliations and affronts, the desires and fear of death. Well, and the sciences? Can the sciences do that? He read many books by neurologists, who suggested various ways to calm the turbulent soul, but none of them was able to prove that they were real. Quite a few psychiatrists and neurologists lost their minds. There was an article about it in the "Warsaw Courier". A serious article, with tables and statistical figures. The bitter

truth is that there is no advice and no cure for a blow. He was right who said "There is no advice and no wisdom against God." 86

Bunem returned to the back room. Kayla was already awake. She sat silently on the couch, her fingers tangled in her hair, her eyes staring at him in wonder, as if she didn't recognize him. Bunem urged her:

"We have to go."

"Is the gate already open?"

"I think."

"Where are we going?"

"To the big train station, Vienna Station. There's a train there that goes to Mlava, or to a nearby town."

"Buneml, I don't want to keep the money with me."

Kayla removed the small bag of bills from around her neck. He took the bag from her and quickly stuffed it into his pocket. This impure money burned his fingers. Only now did he grasp the meaning of the word impure. Such money defiles a person forever. As soon as I earn something, I will pay her everything back, he told himself. Kayla warned him:

"Don't keep it in your front pocket. It could be stolen from you. Don't you have an inside pocket? But first count how many you have."

"Later, later."

Kayla spared herself the need to dress, she slept in her clothes. But Bunem changed his clothes. He put on the modern suit and the hat. He left the long cape and the traditional cloth hat in the atelier. Perhaps Abraham Kliatshko would donate them to a poor man. Kayla marveled:

"Buneml, you look like a fine man now. A real dandy! Oh, what a betrayal can do to a man! I hardly recognize you. A real Count Potocki!" 87

"I am the same one, the same person."

"Are we really going to America?"

"If they don't arrest me on the way, and if they let us enter America. People who smuggle across the border sometimes get caught. A lot of miracles have to happen before we get there."

"Buneml, I have sworn by all that is holy to me: I will never be what I was. From now on, I have only one God and one man. And that man is you. You can marry another woman, but I no longer want to know any man but you. If I do not keep my oath, may a strange death come upon me and I never find rest in the grave. God in heaven, you be my witness."

"Don't swear, don't swear."

"Yes, I swear. In the name of God, in the name of the bones of father and mother, may they rest in peace. If you don't want to know me, I will live alone. I will continue to bless you, and every moment of my life I will beg God to protect you."

"Come on, Kayla. You have a pure soul."

Bunem locked the studio door and took Kayla's basket. The two of them went down the stairs, crossed the yard, and went out into the street. Here and there a shop opened. The city did not know who was leaving and who was coming. It said no goodbyes to anyone, and it did not welcome anyone. Tram

number twenty-two was running on its route, packed with passengers as always. The sun peeked through the morning mists, and it seemed that the weather had improved. The sunlight revealed the dull wretchedness of people's clothes, the fatigue and exhaustion that accompany the persistent winter cold, the damp plaster of the houses, and the yellow hue that had taken over people's faces. But in his eyes shone the news of the lingering spring, whose arrival was still far away. Bunem had the feeling that his nose caught the scent of fresh matzah mixed with the smoke from the chimneys. Here and there a Jew passed by with a bag of tefillin and a tallit, hurrying to the beit midrash, or to the shtevel of Hasidim. It had never occurred to Bunem that he loved Warsaw. But now he felt how attached he was to this city. He knew that he was about to leave Warsaw forever, and only fragments of memories would remain in his heart.

They continued on their way. The sewers were flooded with murky water that flowed into the Vistula. The river absorbs all the filth and carries it to the sea. This is how its waters remain clear and bright. Flocks of pigeons flew along Grzebow Street and circled the church steeples again and again. Pious Gentiles came to mass - rosaries with crosses around their necks, prayer books in their hands. They came with a request and supplication to Jesus, God, and the Holy Mother in their mouths. They carried in white the failures of the past and the hopes for the future. Perhaps their luck would shine after all, and the few years they had left would bring them some comfort from heaven and the grace of God? The church bells rang, and the Polish women crossed their rheumatic fingers, fingers that were crooked from endless daily labor: washing, washing floors, peeling potatoes.

Bunem and Kayla set out on Marszalkowska Street, and immediately arrived at the train station. Bunem asked about a train to Mława, and was told that the train would leave in four hours. There was a restaurant on the third-class platform, and Bunem went in with Kayla to have coffee. Kayla hesitated for a moment. She had been invited to pubs and taverns many times before. But to sit in a restaurant at a train station? She thought it was too much of an honor for someone like her. Besides, a policeman or one of her former customers might still recognize her. Bunem wouldn't have dared to enter such a restaurant in a long cap. Now he had the courage, thanks to the modern clothes he was wearing. He sat down with Kayla at a table, and a waiter immediately arrived. Bunem ordered rolls with butter, salted fish, and coffee, even though the money wasn't his. He felt that he had reached his lowest point, but he hoped that he could repay her for everything. He was willing to work hard in America and bring not only Saltesha, but also his sister Tsirla and perhaps even Shlamela and Khaimka, his younger brothers. Jews have no future under Russian rule. If it is still possible to treat a blood libel against a Jew like Beilis, and in the twentieth century, lawyers and professors openly testify that Jews customarily use Christian blood to bake matzoh, we must flee this country.

D

Bunem was sitting with Kayla and eating breakfast. In the meantime, he noticed a tall man with a pointed beard. The man was wearing a light vest, a hat with a leather visor and was holding a leather bag under his arm. The man stopped and looked at Bunem. Who was this? - Bunem wondered. It must have been one of Kayla's customers from the past. Bunem felt ashamed and lowered his eyes. What a quagmire I have gotten myself into! - he thought to himself. A few minutes passed, and the man approached the table and said in fluent Polish: "His Honor does not recognize me. But I recognize him. We once had a brief meeting at the Café Pod Bliachem." Bunem blushed, and immediately turned pale. It was Saltesza's professor. After all, he himself had come to the café a few weeks ago to tell him that Saltesza - then he called her by her underground nickname, Stasza - was waiting for him near the opera house. Now he stood up and said:

"Yes, I know His Honor."

“You should know that Stasha is sick,” said the professor.

"Yes. I know."

"What are you doing at the train station so early? Are you going somewhere?"

Kayla looked anxiously at the two. Bunem realized what trouble he was in. He was recognized as an anarchist friend of Stasha's. For a moment he remained speechless, and finally said:

"I'm not in very good health either."

"Like this? I met Stasha's mother once. She told me she was looking for you. She met her daughter at the hospital, and the daughter asked her to give you something. Why don't you call the mother? Stasha is very restless. She's worried about you. I can give you her mother's phone number."

"Can I make a phone call?" asked Bunem.

"Yes, Mr. Finkelstein. It is possible."

Bunem understood why the man called him Finkelstein. That was the name he had to mention in the phone call with his mother. There were rumors in the city that the secret police were eavesdropping on phone calls. After a short pause the professor remarked - doubt in the question, doubt in the statement:

"My lord is not leaving our city."

"I'm going to America," Bunem replied, and immediately regretted what he had said. In his embarrassment and confusion, he hurt himself.

The professor looked at Bunem and Kayla.

"Like this? And you didn't even tell Stasha's parents?"

"I came home yesterday and my sister told me the detectives were looking for me," Bunem confessed. He felt his tongue sticking to his cheek from dryness and the words barely coming out of his mouth. The professor asked:

"Do you have Emma's phone number?"

"Yes, yes."

"Call her immediately!"

He spoke the words in a sharp voice, with a tone of command. Bunem realized that he had to introduce Kayla to the professor but did not know how to do it or what name to call her. The professor gave him a

reproachful look: "Do it right away!"

And he left the place with quick steps. Kayla asked:

"Who is this freak?"

"professor."

Bonham began rummaging in his bra pocket. There was supposed to be a little notebook with addresses and phone numbers in it. But then he remembered that he had changed his clothes that morning. He must have left the notebook in the inside pocket of his cap. The phone number of Saltshe's parents might be in the phone book. But under the pressure of the danger threatening him, he had forgotten their last name. All he remembered was that Saltshe's parents lived somewhere on Tamed Street. Well, if he had their phone number, what would he tell them? That he was running away to America with some prostitute? Kayla asked:

"What's wrong with you? You're as white as chalk."

"Nothing, nothing."

Bunem stood up. He wanted to see if the professor was still standing on the platform. But the man had already left, and Bunem said to Kayla:

"Wait for me. I'll be right back."

“Where are you going? Don’t leave me alone.” Kayla almost shouted.

Bonam reassured her. "Don't be afraid. I just want to make a phone call."

“Bunem, come back quickly!” Kayla called anxiously.

"Don't be a baby. I won't leave you!"

He entered a large hall and saw the professor. Was he also going somewhere? The professor was standing in the middle of the hall, and seemed to be waiting for someone. Bunem wondered: Should I ask him for his phone number? - Either way, he couldn't call Saltesha's mother. If he rang, a series of questions and interrogations would begin. And who knows? She might even come here to accompany him. Bunem had already decided to return to the restaurant, but at that moment his gaze met the professor's. The man strode on his long legs and in the blink of an eye was standing next to Bunem.

"You want to make a phone call, huh? There's no public phone here. You can only find a phone on the second-class platform."

"I don't have the number."

"Wait. I'll give it to you. Do you have paper and a pencil?"

"Unfortunately, I have nothing."

"I don't want to interfere in your personal affairs," said the professor. "But who is the woman you were sitting with in the restaurant? Are you going to America with her?"

"She's my cousin," said Bunem. He had a strange feeling that he had lost control of his tongue, and it was talking on its own. After a moment he added: "My parents are poor, and I have no penny. Last night, when my sister told me that the secret police were looking for me, I had only one penny in my pocket. I went to this cousin, and I'm traveling at her expense. I'll pay her back everything in America."

"She decided to go on this journey so quickly?"

"She's wanted this for a long time."

The professor frowned.

"Stasha is going to be tried, and the defense will try to prove that the charges against her are baseless. I know this because the lawyer who took on the defense in her trial is a friend of mine from the past. There was an intention to call you to testify. If you are her son-in-law, and as I heard you are the son of a rabbi, it could help her a lot. The judges will understand that you are both busy preparing for the wedding, and from this everything else follows. If you go to America we will lose, as they say, a central pillar on which the defense can lean."

"The police are looking for me, so I'm also considered guilty. They usually expand the indictment, and drag innocent people into it."

"Yes, yes. How do you know all this? In any case, you must not leave here before you call her parents. Stasha herself is convinced that the relationship between you remains the same. At least she has the right to know if you have stopped loving her."

"Nothing is over."

"Your cousin, or whoever she is, must be traveling as your wife."

"not."

"Call them."

The professor reached into his bra pocket and pulled out a pencil and a piece of paper. He quickly wrote

down the phone number and handed the paper to Bunem. After a moment he was gone. Bunem didn't know if the man had hurried out of the station, or had been swallowed up by the crowd of passengers. He turned back and went back to the restaurant. Kayla sat with her eyes fixed on the door. Her face expressed an anxiety she had never seen before. She stretched her neck strangely, as if handcuffing herself to the door with her eyes. As soon as she saw Bunem, she made a gesture that indicated that she intended to leave the place, and began to speak before Bunem approached the table.

"Where did you go for so long? The waiter came and wanted me to pay him. Where is that goyim? He looks like a deaf policeman. I already thought he took you to the police station, or God knows where."

"Kayla, I don't want to hold your money," Bunem cried, shaken and moved by the words that came out of his mouth.

"Why is that?"

"Keep the money. If I need to buy something, I'll take it from you."

"No, no. They'll steal from me again. Bunemal, what's wrong with you?"

"You shouldn't be left penniless."

The waiter came and presented the bill. Bunem gave him half a ruble. The waiter returned the change and blinked, as if he had given an obscene wink.

"What is this? Do you know him?"

"I know him? How is that?"

"Kayla, I have to go make a phone call. You stay here. I won't leave you without the money. This is

terrifying you."

He took out the small bag of bills and held it out to her. Kayla tried to refuse.

"Everyone is watching. They'll take it from me."

"Stay here. I'll be right back."

the

The professor told Bunem that he could make a phone call from the restaurant on the second-class passenger platform, but for some reason Bunem did not dare go in there. In such places sit respectable gentlemen, pirates, military officers, and sometimes police officers. Bunem spoke Polish with a Yiddish accent, and preferred to speak in Yiddish to Saltesza's mother. At that moment he felt as if he were still wearing the long hood, even though he was wearing a modern suit. He left the station and began to look for a place from which he could make a phone call: a restaurant or a pharmacy. Meeting the professor frightened him, because he did not want Saltesza to know that he was traveling with someone. He had never told Saltesza that he had a cousin in Warsaw. Now he would have to explain to his mother what had happened to him, or come up with some plausible lie. The professor's words about Saltesza's defense attorney calling him to testify frightened him. Generations of Jews had passed on to their descendants the terror of foreign authorities and gentile courts. He stood for a moment in front of the Netivot House and surveyed Marszalkowska Street.

His body was still in Warsaw, but his soul had already left this city. He had separated from his parents, his sister, and his two brothers. Bunem did live in Warsaw, but he did not know it. Except for the few Jewish streets where he grew up, the entire city was foreign to him. Trams drove back and forth with bells ringing and wheels screeching. Carriages and carriages mingled with the automobiles. There were hardly any cars to be seen on the side streets. But here, in the city center, their number was growing day by day. In Warsaw, there were still omnibus lines - carriages pulled in a row by three harnessed horses. Even a horse-drawn tram still ran here. If Warsaw is so bustling, what will it be like in New York? Bunem thought. They said that they built houses there that were dozens of stories high, and trains ran on the roofs of the houses.

Finally he went into the restaurant and called. But no one answered. Saltesha's father was probably at their factory, and her mother - in the shop next to the factory. Suddenly Bunem remembered their last name, the same name that had previously slipped from his memory. Buchbinder. Saltesha's father was called Jacob, and her mother - Irene. Bunem returned to the train station and went into the third-class restaurant. But Kayla was not there. He went to look in the large hall, and found her sitting on a bench. He saw in her eyes again the fear of those who are lost and lost on the road. She asked in her complaint:

"Where are you hanging around? Why is it taking so long? I already thought you left me and went off to who knows where."

"Kayla, don't talk nonsense."

"Ah. But I'm sitting here in the noise and commotion. So much shouting, my ears are deaf. Even an experienced and confident person can get lost in this place. All kinds of crazy thoughts are running through my head."

"What thoughts?"

"Ah, you regretted the whole thing and went somewhere. Ever since I've known you, I've seen that you keep changing. One moment you're here, and the next you're there. Spinning and turning like a magic ring. A policeman passed by, and he looked at me with evil, angry eyes, until I thought he was dragging me to prison. You could have come back and not found me. They ask to see my passport, and without an ID they might put me on a prisoner transport and throw me who knows where."

"Soon you'll be in America. It's a free country. There you don't need IDs, and they don't send anyone in a convoy of prisoners."

"They might as well not let me in. What will I do then? I'll have no choice but to jump into the sea."

A worn-out whore, chattering like a naive girl, Bunem thought, and hurried to encourage her:

"We'll let you in. Nothing is written on your forehead."

"Ah, sometimes it seems to me that everyone knows what I am. All the men look at me as if they want to mock me. Women walk past me and spit with venomous contempt. How do they know?"

"It's all in your head. Imagination."

"I'm used to you already. But you're like a doctor, or a pharmacist. I felt more comfortable with you when you wore the long hood. But now you're like some fancy stranger."

"In America you have to wear modern clothes, not a long hood."

"What will we do in America?"

"In America you have to work. There they are not ashamed of any job."

"What should I do? Do I need maids there?"

"Maids are needed everywhere."

"Oh, Bunemal, I don't know, I'm so scared. I think it's all my fault. Because of me, you're leaving everything and traveling far away. If I hadn't come to you then, on the eve of Sukkot, you would have stayed home. I have that kind of bad luck. Wherever I don't go, there's a mess right away."

"Kayla, it's not your fault. It's not because of you that the police are looking for me."

"Maybe Max snitched on you?"

"Huh? No. It's not Max."

They both fell silent. Kayla closed her eyes. It was hard to tell if she was sleeping or trying to fall asleep. Bunem studied her with his gaze. How strange, her face expressed a soft gentleness. There were no features typical of greedy types who want to snatch everything for themselves. She looked pale, weak, almost sick. She reminded Bunem of a portrait of a dead girl he had once seen in a neighbor's house. A gentle grace froze on the face of the deceased, a kind of noble kindness that envelops the body that no longer asks for anything for itself, and that can no longer be repaid or tormented. How had Kayla gone through all this and remained pure? Bunem wondered. Well, a facial expression can also be deceiving. He too began to doze off. He had hardly slept last night. Now he heard the locomotives' horns and the whistling agitation of the steam jets emitted from them. He caught the sound of voices at the train station, and at the same time he fell into a dream. In his dream he was already in America, and saw a train traveling over the roofs of houses. Crowds of people crowded the streets and shouted something indistinct - a greeting of peace or a warning and a hostile rebuke. Bunem fell into a sleep, and immediately woke up in a panic. Had he missed the train? Someone stood next to him and woke him up: a woman in a fur coat and hat. She spoke to him, but he did not catch her words because he was in a doze, as if waking from a deep sleep. After a moment he heard the woman ask:

"Are you Bunem? Bunem Thomasover?" 88

"Yes. It's me."

"I'm Irene Buchbinder. Saltsche's mother. I recognized you from a photograph. Saltsche's professor called me and told me you were going to America."

Only after a while did Bonham realize what was happening. It was the first time he had seen the woman: short as Saltshe, and similar to her. But Saltshe's figure was graceful, and this woman was thick and bulky. The signs of age were evident in her: she had a high chest, and several gold teeth gleamed from her mouth. She pointed to Kayla, who was sitting sleepily beside him, and asked: "Is this your cousin?" At that moment Kayla opened her eyes.

"Yes, that's my cousin," Bunem answered loudly, trying to keep his tone steady. As he did so, he bumped

Kayla's knee with his knee—a hint that she should support the lie. The woman looked at Kayla and her meager bundle, and asked, "Is that all you're taking with you to America?"

"Mrs. Buchbinder, the secret police are looking for me. I couldn't even say goodbye to my parents."

"When did you decide to go?"

"Last night, in the evening."

"Did your cousin immediately agree to go with you? Please, would you be so kind as to leave me for a moment. There is a terrible noise here, and I can't even hear my own voice."

“What time is it?” Bunem asked the woman and himself.

The woman glanced at the large clock hanging above the entrance gate to the platform. The clock indicated that there was plenty of time left: an hour and a half until the trip. He turned to Kayla:

"Kayla, sit here. I'll go into the restaurant with the lady for a moment. We'll be back soon."

"Where are you going again? I'll lose you again!"

"Kayla, we're not leaving the station grounds. The lady and I will sit in the same place where we had breakfast earlier."

"Come back quickly. The train is leaving soon."

Kayla gave Mrs. Buchbinder a look that was a mixture of fear and hostility, and she grimaced in disgust.

Bunem repeated:

"Sit here. Don't go anywhere."

"Wait. I have to go to the bathroom," Kayla said after a slight hesitation.

"Well, okay. Go. We'll wait for you here."

"Where is it?"

Bunem didn't know. But Mrs. Buchbinder, an experienced Warsaw resident, volunteered to show her the way and explain how to get there. Kayla said apprehensively:

"I will get confused and lose my way. I will not know how to get back."

"Here's a sign for you. We're sitting here, facing the door."

A long time passed before Kayla decided to go to the bathroom alone. She took a few steps, and looked back. Mrs. Buchbinder sat down in Kayla's seat. She was silent for a moment, then said:

"Forgive me for interrupting. But when Saltesha's professor called me and said that you were going to America in secret, without saying goodbye at all, I couldn't believe my ears. True, you never visited us, although we expected you to introduce yourself, and we invited you several times. Saltesha apologized on your behalf, explaining that you were a shy guy, and above all - a Hasid, a member of the Beit Midrash, who had just set out for the New World. But you don't look Hasidic, and not at all shy. Who is the girl? She is not your cousin. You are from a family of rabbis, respectable Jews, and this girl looks simple and cheap. Saltesha told me that you have no relatives in Warsaw, because they all live somewhere in the distant province. Listen," Mrs. Buchbinder changed her tone, "I didn't come here to preach to you. Saltesha spoke of you as one would speak of a person close to her heart, a son-in-law, a future husband. She praised you, and even "Praise your character and your talent for painting. But somehow your

behavior does not deserve these accolades. You know that Saltesha is in the hands of murderers and her life is in danger. We do not want to force anything on you. As soon as Saltesha is freed from their hands, she will find the right partner for her. I visited her twice, and both times she did not stop talking about you. I tried to look for you in the studio, but - as it turns out - you stopped coming there."

Bunem tried to explain himself:

"Mrs. Buchbinder, last night I came home and my sister told me that the clumsy Russians were looking for me. I immediately turned around and left. I didn't even say goodbye to my father and mother."

"Where did you get money for the trip? As far as I know, you don't have more than a hundred rubles."

Bonham paused.

"My cousin is lending me the money for travel expenses."

"Stop calling her cousin. She is your cousin, just as I am the Countess Potocki. She is your mistress. That is what she is. Good times have come! A young man, the son of a teacher, is having an affair with some kind of sewer girl and is addicted to her. I am not Saltasha. You cannot fool me. I see the truth at once. In a second. What kind of wisdom is it to make fun of another person? Saltasha's lawyer was going to invite you to testify at her trial, but since you are going to America, and with another woman, there is no point in it. It is all in vain. I ask you only one thing: write a short letter to Saltasha and tell her that you are deceiving her. Tell her that you have replaced her with someone else, and it is all over between you. I do not want my daughter to sit and suffer in prison and continue to put into her head things that were not and were not created. She must know the truth, even if it hurts. My husband does not know anything about the whole thing. He is at the factory now. If he had heard "The way you treated his beloved daughter, he would come running here, and God only knows what he might do. He loves her and fears for her safety as if she were the apple of his eye. Since she was arrested, he hasn't slept whole nights and won't let me sleep. How will you travel to America? Do you have an international passport?"

"I have nothing."

"You have nothing, and you act like a high-minded Fritz. If my husband were here in my place, he would see to it that you were arrested immediately. And rightly so. But I don't want to get carried away with such incitement. I won't call the police on you. It's enough that my girl fell for the trap. You must have convinced her to get involved in such dangers - - -"

Bunem wanted to answer, but at that moment he saw Kayla. She was standing in the middle of the station and looking in all directions. She had apparently forgotten where she had been sitting before. Bunem apologized to the lady: "Excuse me. I'll be right back." And he ran to Kayla.

and

Bunem approached Kayla, and only then did he realize what a tremendous change had taken place in her. In the few minutes that had passed since he had parted with her, her face had become haggard and haggard, white as chalk. Her hair was wild and disheveled. She looked as if she had been given bad news. What was the matter with her? Was she sick? - a thought crossed his mind. He noticed that her dress was wet, and drops of water were dripping from her sleeves. For a moment he stood wondering and astonished, looking at her in wonder, unable to say a word. Finally he asked: "What about you? What happened?"

Kayla let out a terrible wail, her voice drowning out the hustle and bustle of the bus station. People stopped, and from all corners of the station they looked at her curiously. "My money! It's gone!" she began to scream and blurt out words that he could not distinguish between her wild cries. She screamed and jumped towards him, waving her arms. Such were the cries of anguish uttered by the prostitutes of Krochmalena Street when their pimps beat them to death. Bunem tried to calm her down, but her sobs grew louder. A policeman appeared, followed by Mrs. Buchbinder running. Kayla stamped her feet, waved her arms, and scratched her tear-stained face with her nails. Suddenly she slammed herself to the floor and fell on the bundles of one of the passengers. Bunem tried to lift her up, but she struggled against him. Mrs. Buchbinder cried out:

"What's going on here? Oh my God!"

"I've lost everything! Every penny! My mother! I wish I were lying where you are lying! Robbers! Murderers! Leave me alone, you fool! Leave me alone! I don't want to live anymore! Ro-ro-ro-ro!"

“What happened here? Did they steal something from her?” the policeman asked. He quickly took a pencil and a notebook from his pocket and began to write down. A group of curious people crowded around Kayla. Bunem did not know Russian, and Mrs. Buchbinder said to the policeman:

"Probably. She was going to go to America, and they took everything from her."

"Did they take her wallet?" the policeman asked.

"I don't remember her having a purse," Mrs. Buchbinder answered.

"Where did it happen? Here, in the middle of the station?"

"In the bathroom!" Kayla screamed. "I asked him to keep the money, but he gave it back to me, and so - - -"

Kayla pointed an accusing finger at Bunem. Foam formed at the corners of her mouth, as in a fit of delirium. A flash of madness flashed in her eyes, and they rolled back in their sockets. The hem of her dress was undone, and Bunem bent down and put them back in place. The policeman asked Mrs. Buchbinder:

"What is your name? Do you know this woman?"

"I only know this young man. I know nothing about her. Neither who she is nor what she is."

"My packages! My packages! Where are my packages?" Kayla burst into wild wailing again. "They'll take that from me too! What a disaster! Robbery and robbery! Typhoid fever! Smallpox! Let them burn! Let them burn like hell!"

"Kayla, get up. Don't make such a fuss!"

"You're guilty! You, you, you!..."

An inhuman scream erupted from Kayla's throat. An animal's roar. The policeman asked her:

"What is your name? What are you? A servant? What is your address?"

"My packages! They'll take that away from me too!" Kayla burst out in a renewed cry.

Bonham pushed his way through the dense circle of curious onlookers and returned to the bench he had been sitting on. Kayla's package and basket were lying there. Kayla had been robbed of her money. All that remained were the tickets to Malaba, which he had bought earlier. Heaven would not allow him to travel to America with her impure money! - The voice of the faith embedded in his soul spoke its word. Now he was afraid to return to the policeman. For what? He might still lead him to the headquarters together with Kayla. All the evil forces had forced themselves on me today!...

Bunem often argued to Kliatschko and Tsirle, and to himself, that there was no private providence, even if there was a God. Why would the Lord of the universe consider each person individually? If he were indeed omnipotent, then he could create forces and world orders that had the same purpose and validity in all cases. Even in heaven it was difficult to keep a special ledger for each person, each bacterium, each fine blade of grass. Hadn't nature endowed every tree and every plant with an enormous number of seeds, more than were necessary for reproduction? Hadn't she given men and women countless sperm and eggs, many times more than were necessary for the birth of new generations? That was what he had argued in the past. But now he clearly felt how an invisible hand was managing his fate, placing stumbling blocks in his path, thwarting all his plans. It had begun with the encounter with Saltasha's professor, then with the meeting with her mother, and now - the catastrophe with Kayla. Who knows? Perhaps his father had succeeded, with the help of his prayers, in causing the heavens to prevent his journey? Perhaps Saltesha was endowed with some hidden power? Thoughts of repentance rose in Bunem's mind, along with a renewed sense of the pain, anxiety, and humiliation he had experienced that morning. So what would he do now? Would he run away from here and leave Kayla alone, with the despair and mental anguish of her situation? Most of all, he was ashamed of Saltesha's mother. Not long ago, Bunem read Dr. Shlomo Rubin's translation of Spinoza's "Ethics." In the fifth part, in the section dealing with emotions, there was a phrase that referred to a situation in which conflicting

emotions act on a person in a way that paralyzes the mind and does not allow him to decide to act one way or another. He, Bunem, was now stuck in such a problematic situation. His legs gave way under him, and he was forced to sit down on the seat next to Kayla's bundles. Whatever happens, I have lost control of the course of my life, he thought. Coincidence? No, it is not a coincidence. He closed his eyes for a moment. He wanted to die, like Kayla who had asked for her death earlier. I can no longer bear all this, he apologized to the invisible forces that listen to human musings.

Bunem assumed that the policeman would appear at any moment and take him to jail. But long minutes passed, and no one interrupted him. In all the commotion around him, he felt a kind of silent silence. For a moment it occurred to him that such silence surrounded a man whose ship had sunk and he was clinging to a plank or a plank of wood floating on the surface of the stormy sea. Bunem remembered the expression "morality to heaven." After all plans collapse and the threads of thought are torn and scattered to every wind like cobwebs, a person must believe with all his heart that what is decreed from above must happen below. He caught a slight rustle and opened his eyes. Mrs. Buchbinder approached the bench, holding Kayla's arm and leading her as one would lead a terminally ill person to the doctor, or to a first-aid cart. Kayla could barely drag her feet.

Mrs. Buchbinder scolded Bunem, and there was a note of closeness in her voice:

"What did you do in the middle of all the commotion? Look at him! He's sitting there dozing off like nothing happened. They didn't steal from him!" Mrs. Buchbinder raised her voice, almost shouting. "The bag of money fell down the toilet in the bathroom. I haven't heard anything like that since I've been alive and standing on my own two feet!"

"How did this happen?"

"Ask her. I look, and see that the sleeves of her dress are wet. All her belongings were hanging on a frayed string. The string broke, and the bag fell straight into the filth. Tsk-tsk, before what and before whom, it fell into a hole from which there is no return."

"How is that? She said they stole from her!"

"They didn't steal from her."

"I asked him," Kayla whined. "Keep the money with you. For years and years I had that bag hanging around my neck and nothing happened to it. Everything remained intact. Suddenly it fell right into the hole. I tried to pull it out, but there were some gold coins in there. If it hadn't been for them, the bag would have floated on the water."

Kayla spoke in a weak, half-hoarse voice, the voice of someone whose strength has been drained from him, and who can only deliver the gist of dry facts. Bunem rose from his seat and Kayla sank into the seat. "What am I going to do now?" she asked tearfully. "What am I going to do but go to the Vistula and drown myself?"

Mrs. Buchbinder responded dismissively: "Three hundred carbon- 89s aren't worth a man drowning himself over," she said, directing her words at Kayla, at Bonham, and also at herself. "There is no doubt," she added, "God wanted you to stay here in Warsaw. This way and no other. America, like the grave, will never escape. Now you can tell me the truth: are you relatives or a couple in love? People don't just run off, with such haste, to America, without saying goodbye to anyone, not even their parents. Even the lowest and most cheap types don't do such a thing. I have only one hope now: that my Saltesha will be rescued from the hands of the Gentiles. Bunem, I must go. My husband is coming to lunch, and if he sees that I am not at home, he will think who knows what. In the twenty-five years that we have been married, I have never missed lunch with my husband, except for the days when I knelt down to give birth to Saltesha. Take this woman to her house, to the place where she lives. And you," Mrs. Buchbinder suddenly turned to Bunem, "you go home to your parents. You haven't been through anything. A crime, so you won't be hanged. If you're called to testify, come to court and say that my girl is innocent. If you haven't got a penny in your pocket, I can lend you money to hire a carriage. She," Mrs. Buchbinder pointed at Kayla, "can't walk in her condition, and there's no way they'll let her get on a tram." Mrs. Buchbinder glared at Bunem, and strode briskly towards the exit from the station. Bunem glanced at the big clock hanging above the platform.

"Kayla, come on."

"Where?" Kayla asked in a muffled voice.

"To Malaba. The train leaves in fifteen minutes."

"Like this, like me? Without a penny?" Kayla asked. "I'm completely filthy!"

"You can change clothes inside the train. You have to decide quickly: either America or death."

Menachem - Mendel Beilis was the victim of an antisemitic blood libel. In April 1911, he was accused of murdering a Ukrainian boy in order to use his blood to bake matzoh for Passover. Beilis was arrested, and his trial was held in Kiev on the grounds of wild incitement against the Jews (starting in September 1913). He was eventually acquitted and released. Only after the 1917 revolution was a substantive investigation conducted, and it became clear that the boy had been murdered on a criminal basis. The Soviet regime located the murderer and the instigators of the murder, and the court sentenced them to death. Beilis himself was not in Russia at the time. He immigrated to Israel in 1914 , but was not accepted here.
In 1920 , he moved to New York.

This is how the Jewish street called the Russians, believers of the Greek - Orthodox Church. In the Jewish vocabulary, this word has a meaning with deep historical roots, according to which a Greek is a scoundrel.

Bonam is not precise in his quotation. He also omits the beginning of the verse, thereby changing the meaning of the scriptures: "A wicked man is bold in his own eyes, but the upright will prepare his ways. There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord" (Proverbs 21:29-30) .

A common term on the Jewish street in Poland to describe a wealthy and noble person. The Potocki family was one of the most important families of the Polish nobility, dating back to the Middle Ages.

The lady addresses them in the third person plural, according to the rules of etiquette in Poland of those days.

This is what the Russian ruble was called on the Jewish street.

Part Two

Chapter Eight

A

A year and a few more months passed. Bunem and Kayla had already experienced everything: the train ride to Malaba, the smuggling across the border into Germany without the help of smugglers, the trip to Hamburg on train tickets they bought with the little money they received for Kayla's handful of jewelry, the jostling in fourth class on board a German ship that crossed the ocean for two weeks. They bought their cruise tickets from a travel agency that gave them credit in exchange for a promise to repay five dollars a month after they reached New York. The two, who presented themselves as husband and wife, obtained thirty German marks from a German Jewish charity that helped immigrants from Russia. After Bunem and Kayla were released from Ellis Island, they began to hold on. Kayla managed to get a job as a maid for an old, single doctor who lived on East Broadway. Bunem tried to be arrogant, and later got a job in a factory. Ten hours a day he stuck labels on paper boxes, and received two dollars a week. Later he got a job as a melamed in some private Talmud-Torah school. The children would come there after school hours at the 91st General School to learn a little Judaism: to pray and to get to know the weekly Torah portion and the Haftarah, as part of the preparation for the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. They spoke bad Yiddish, and Bunem had not yet learned to pronounce English words correctly. Besides, the students despised the new melamed, the green rookie who had just arrived in America, and showed no desire to assimilate foreign content into their way of life here, in America. What did they care if thousands of years ago our forefather Jacob set out from Beersheba for Haran, put a stone for his head and dreamed of a ladder that stood on the earth and its top touched the sky? The children chewed gum while they studied. They mocked Bunem's broken English, and were bored by the Torah studies they had to bother with, mainly because they had to learn the Haftarah melody. One Haftarah described in detail the Temple built by King Solomon; another comforted the Jews exiled from their land and promised them that they would be able to return to a rebuilt Jerusalem; a third Haftarah demanded that the Israelites stop worshipping Ashtoreth, stop sacrificing children to Molech, and return to God. Otherwise, God would send plagues and plagues, wild animals, and besides these, would raise up against them the armies of Egypt, Assyria, Syria, and Babylon. The children could not pronounce the Hebrew words and foreign names. Some of them were so tired that they yawned endlessly. Some fell asleep in the middle of the lesson and slept until the end. Bunem concluded to himself that this study was useless. These children will not put on tefillin or bless the Torah scroll more than once in their lives. Their parents work on Shabbat. All of America is a melting pot whose immigrants have forgotten the old house, with all its prejudices and religious fanaticism. Why do these children need to know the width of the copper basins in the Temple and the wingspan of the cherubim that carry the Ark of the Covenant? Why do they need to learn a language that has been dead for two thousand years of exile? Well, apparently, American Jews have preserved one ritual from the complex of Jewish symbols of the old house: the Bar Mitzvah celebration. Bunem needed the four dollars a week he received as a teaching salary. He feared that the students would run away from him, and he would be forced to return to work in the factory. There is no good air to breathe there, and the sounds of the banging and rattling of the machines are deafening. In addition, the Portuguese and Italian workers in the factory laughed at him and teased him with all kinds of pranks.

The building where he taught was rented by immigrants from a town in Bessarabia. Every Saturday night they held a social gathering there. Once, Bunem attended a meeting of these Jews and their wives, and wrote the minutes for them. The president of the union banged on the table with a wooden mallet, loudly demanding that the hall be quiet. They talked for a long time about the prices of burials in the cemetery. Their Yiddish had many English words interspersed with it. A fat widow came in with complaints and asked why her late husband had been buried next to his first wife. Afterwards, the public went to the restaurant to eat sausages and drink beer. The hall was full of noise and commotion. Here they cursed and there they kissed. Here they chatted about death, and there they joked about methods for removing hair from the legs and about bargains worth buying: shoes, dresses, underwear. One of the men told at length about an incident that had happened to his employer. The man set fire to his workshop to collect insurance money, but his competitor had reported him. He was now in prison. Finally, the crowd dispersed suddenly, and Bunem was left alone. It was late at night, and he could barely ask and figure out how to get to Attorney Street. There, he and Kayla rented a small apartment without a bathroom on the fourth floor. The bathroom shared by the tenants of the floor was at the end of the hallway. There were also large apartments there, with a private bathroom and toilet, but Bunem and Kayla had to make do with little. Once a week, they went to a barber who rented out bathtubs to casual customers, and there they bathed.

The apartment was small and cramped: one room with a kitchenette without a window. The room where they slept and ate had a small window. Outside the window hung a ladder - a kind of emergency staircase in case of fire. In front of the apartment was a kind of basement, which they called a basement here, and there was a brothel in it. The prostitutes sat barefoot and half-naked on the entrance steps, begging passersby to come in. From the open windows all around there was a constant noise: the sounds of loud talking, singing, the playing of a gramophone. Most of the neighbors were subtenants, speaking Borders, and the housewives cooked for them and washed their clothes. The wet laundry was hung to dry on ropes stretched across the flat roofs.

Bunem felt as if he were on some kind of Kruchmalna street. In his eyes, it was a worse kind than the previous one. There, the houses had inner courtyards with synagogues, Hasidic seminaries, "chapters." At the front entrance lived wealthy people, respectable Jews. All the women wore foreign wigs or covered their heads with bonnets. The prostitutes and thieves did not mix with good girls and yeshiva boys. Everyone had their own place, according to their status and situation. Here it was difficult to distinguish between a decent family and someone from a simple, rude home; here the difference between those who earned their living from trade or craft and those who lived by theft and prostitution was not noticeable; here they could not tell who was Jewish and who was Gentile. Everyone spoke a language that was neither Yiddish nor English. Children played on the sidewalk and shouted loudly. Their palms were in wide leather gloves, and they bounced a huge ball with a thick stick. A bullet like that

hitting a passerby in the head could cause serious injury, even blindness. Large garbage cans stood in front of the doors of the houses. A terrible noise deafened the ears here: in the early morning hours, the milk carts drove by, and behind them continued the rumble of passenger carts and freight carts loaded with meat, fruit, and vegetables. There were also carts with blocks of ice for the refrigerators.

Kayla used to close the window curtains so as not to see the shameful girls, who reminded her of the misery of her past life. Thank God, here, in the foreign land, in the big block called New York, no one knew her. No one knew about the shame and disgrace in her and Bunem's life story. The neighbors called her Mrs. Tomashuber. Others shortened the name, and called her Mrs. Tomasz. They knew that her husband was a teacher, an educated man. Women came to him to have him write a letter for them in Yiddish to the relatives who remained in the old house. They wanted to give him a fee, but he refused to take it. Old women lived here, whose father had left them holy books and other books in Yiddish. But neither they nor their husbands used these books, so they gave them to Bunem. There were Gemara books, Mishnayot, various dictionaries - English/Yiddish, English/Hebrew - as well as magazines and newspaper clippings. Kayla bought a used bookcase for Bunem. She treated everything that was written and printed with great respect. She often said how sorry she was that she couldn't read the small print. When Bunem wrote or read, she walked silently, on tiptoe. Well, compared to Bunem, she picked up more English words. She heard English spoken on the street and in the grocery store. She learned from the children running around. Bunem did it differently. He wrote down English words on scraps of paper that he had collected and kept in a cigar box that someone had thrown away. Kayla often heard him memorize words like table, ceiling , wall, picture . He often used difficult words, which Kayla had never heard in the grocery stores or among the vendors: noun, verb, adverb . Sometimes he would memorize these words at night, after dinner, when he was already in bed and she was washing dishes or washing her hair in the sink and brushing her teeth - a habit she had adopted in America. Here she also learned to fight cockroaches, and every few nights she would sprinkle poison powder in the corners of the apartment to kill them.

Lying in bed together was a festive occasion for both of them; a celebration that was repeated and renewed every night. Now they no longer had to hide in the pantry, lock themselves in the freezing atelier, or make do with the open deck of the ship - as they had done on their journey here. No one demanded that they declare that they were husband and wife, as they had been required to do at Ellis Island. The Americans believed everything they were told. They didn't care what the lineage of someone or someone unknown was, no one here had a passport - neither black nor yellow. As soon as Kayla locked the door and turned off the gas lamp, their holiday began - a kind of good day that was renewed for them at night. They went to bed early. Every night Kayla told what had happened to her working for Dr. Welcher. Her employer was an old bachelor, about seventy years old. A pitiful man, with a lung disease, who pitied all creatures - both humans and animals. His patients were old, destitute people, and he hardly asked them for payment. He was a vegetarian, and ate neither meat nor fish. His apartment was so crammed with books and magazines that it was impossible to clean it. Kayla bought him the

necessary supplies and cooked vegetarian food for him. The work was light and easy, and the doctor often allowed her to go home early.

on

Most of the day Kayla felt as if she were still on the ship. The city rumbled and churned like a stormy sea. The windows shook as heavy carts or trucks passed by on the street. More than once, everything in the apartment shook: the walls, the floor, the ceiling. Loud noises burst in from the street and the surrounding market stalls. Every now and then a fire engine would sound, ambulances would honk, loud voices would echo, and Kayla couldn’t identify them. Were they human voices or machines?

But at night everything calmed down and fell silent. She lay next to Bunem, and the more she snuggled up to him and hugged him, the more she felt that they were not close enough. He slept with her with a lust and intensity that Kayla had never known with any of the men she had had. She remembered nothing from the past, and it was as if he had erased from her consciousness everything that had happened to her up to now. She knew very well that legally she was still Jarma's wife, because she had not received a divorce from him. Kayla did not stand with Bunem under the canopy, but in the eyes of people, and perhaps in the eyes of God as well, he was her husband. In the darkness of the night they returned to Warsaw, not in a dream or in the villages of the imagination. Under the cover of darkness the distant city took on a tangible reality. The man and woman lay together, and found themselves again in the Jewish streets of the old city. Kayla remembered everything she had left there. Her thoughts even brought her back to her hometown. Somewhere there she had a brother and a sister, and perhaps a father. There were also relatives who remembered her name, but were quick to spit whenever it was mentioned. Kayla would sacrifice half her life so that everyone would know that she had long since cast the disgrace of her former life behind her, and was now pure and kosher. Here, in New York, she lived as the wife of a scholar, the son of a teacher, a scholar and a scholar.

He slept with her again and again, several times a night. In between, they rested and talked. Kayla asked Bunem not to mention her lifestyle in the past years. He had promised her, but he had broken his promise. She herself sometimes blurted out words she shouldn't have said. Is it possible to deny everything and ignore what had happened to her for so many years? The mouth itself couldn't keep up with its words. Bunem was very curious about the previous period in her life. Slowly, he coaxed out of her the names of all her previous lovers, those who had supposedly loved her but had in fact stolen her profits. He even demanded that she tell him about her sins before she arrived in Warsaw and became the wife of an experienced pauper. He forced her to refresh her memory. Who was her first, second, third man? Slowly, these conversations turned into a kind of slushy swamp of lust; A slippery swamp,

impossible to drown in and impossible to get out of. All her sins, all her adventures and lusts were deeply embedded in her mind. Dr. Welcher had a buffet full of drinks for the most part. He himself was forbidden to drink, and Kayla used to pour herself a glass from time to time, or secretly sip straight from the bottle. She was afraid that Bonham would scold her if he smelled the alcohol wafting from her mouth. But he only warned her not to overdo it. He too had a glass of whiskey here and there. Here, in America, decent people drank too. Not just drunks. Bottles of whiskey, cognac, scotch—whatever they called these types of drinks—were standing in the neighbors' houses. Life here was hard, full of hasty hustle and bustle, and people were looking for ways to calm themselves and amuse themselves.

Talking about life in Warsaw became a kind of intoxication for Bunem and Kayla. Bunem didn't have much to say. He had never conquered any other woman except Kayla, but he revealed to her all his sexual fantasies. He told her about what he had read in books, pamphlets, and newspapers, and described in great detail all his contacts with Saltesha. He said that he had sent a letter to Saltesha's mother, but had not received any reply from her. When he left, Saltesha was imprisoned in the fortress. Who knows? Maybe she had been sentenced to death? Maybe she had already been reincarnated somewhere in the Siberian steppes? Sometimes they would slip into talk about Yarma. Who knows, maybe he and Max had been imprisoned, and they were sitting together in the same cell again, devoting themselves to male sex?

When they arrived in Hamburg, Bunem wrote to his parents' house, and later - he also wrote from New York. But his father and mother did not answer him. Only a letter came from Tsirla. She said that the parents of her son-in-law, Mordechai-Zerach, had canceled the match as soon as they learned of Bunem's escape to America. They summoned her and her parents to a Torah hearing, and Tsirla gave Mordechai-Zerach a letter of forgiveness. Now she was no longer a bride, but simply a grown girl. The tone of the letter was sarcastic, but Tsirla also expressed in it the pain and sorrow that had overcome the parents when they learned that their son was living in America. The police came back to their house, and his father declared that Bunem was not considered a son in his eyes. Someone said that the parents would have to pay three hundred rubles - a fine for their son's evasion of military service. This was one of the decrees that the Russians issued against the Jews. Cirla now had only one ambition: to get to America before her parents gave her up to some other poor braggart. She preferred to work hard in a factory or be a servant, as long as she didn't fall into the hands of a bum.

A second letter arrived shortly after the first, and Cirla wrote in it:

My beloved brother, Bonam, I wish you good health and long life!

I wrote to you a few days ago, but something happened that forces me to write again. A letter arrived in Polish from a certain Mrs. Buchbinder. This woman writes that you were her daughter's son-in-law, but you abandoned her and ran off with another. This lady met you at the train station and saw that you had run off with some cheap girl who had lost her money at the train station, and perhaps it had been stolen from her. You remember, Buneml, that I don't know how to read Polish very well, especially since the lady wrote in crooked and blurred letters. I had a hard time reading the letter, and it cost me my health. I swallowed frogs until I managed to crawl through it and get to the end. 92 It's a good thing that mother wasn't at home when the postman brought the letter. I don't believe this story, but I also don't believe that the lady made up everything from her heart. I haven't shown mother the letter until now, because I feel sorry for her. Since you ran away to America, she's been very nervous, and bursts into tears every time your name is mentioned. That's all she needs, to hear such slander! The neighbors on the street are making up all kinds of stories about you. Things that never happened and were never made up. The one who collects the weekly payment for father claims that people don't want to give him a penny because the teacher raised heretical children. Even Lamela and Haimka are suffering in the "room." People are gossiping and saying that I canceled the match. They're making up this lie in their heads, as if I returned the terms, not the in-laws. I'm afraid that father will have to leave the street. But where will he go? Bunemal, I can't stand all the slander and slander anymore. How far will I go if I stay in Warsaw? What will be my purpose here? It seems that God heard my plea and freed me from that Mordechai-Zerach. Who knows? Maybe he also sent you to America, as the Torah says about Joseph? After all, the Pentateuch says that Joseph came to Egypt to bring his brothers there! I can't stay in Warsaw anymore. I'm suffocating here. If you send me a ticket, I'll leave everything and run away from this hell. Father, may he be healthy, knows only one thing: study all day. I'm left with a dowry that I no longer need, and Father is left with debts up to his head. We're being sued from all sides and threatened with confiscation of all our bedding and household items. Really, no one will laugh.

Your devoted and loyal sister, Zirel. Answer immediately! I eagerly await your reply. I will wait for the postman every day, so that your letter will reach me directly. It is not easy, but I do not want you to start a commotion at home, which will only make things worse.

Best wishes from the bottom of my heart. If you have someone there, give her my regards.

With much love, your sister

third

Ellis Island is a small island in the mouth of the Hudson River that served as a transit point for immigrants to the United States. Immigrants underwent medical examinations to ensure that they did not have infectious diseases that could harm the local population. Immigration authorities also checked to see if the immigrant did not endanger public safety and welfare in any way.

In this part of the novel, the voice of American Yiddish resonates, as part of the representation of real reality. This sound stems from the fact that it has absorbed many English words, and adopted the names of streets and neighborhoods. For example: "East Broadway", "Job", "School". In a Hebrew translation, such a sound may sound harsh. Therefore, I have left words that have been assimilated into Hebrew, and written the names of streets and places in Hebrew letters (in the original, these names appear in Yiddish).

Tsirla uses a figurative figure of speech that cannot be translated: "S'iz mir ankadum mit griene verim dem brivou durchzukrichen" (Free translation: Crawling along the letter brought up green worms on me). The translation offered here is based on the well-known expression "to swallow frogs."

In July, the parents of Bunem's students took their children on vacation in the Catskill Mountains, and Bunem was left without a teaching job until September. Dr. Weltscher locked up his apartment and went to England to spend the summer with his family. Bunem and Kayla were left without a source of income. They needed money. The rent came to twelve dollars a month. Bunem read the classified ads in the Yiddish newspapers carefully, perhaps he could find some kind of job or part-time job. But no one was looking for a teacher or tutor at the moment. There was no demand for maids either. Bunem went every day to the Education Department, where he took an English course. In the same building, painters exhibited their pictures. Most of them were amateur paintings. One painter, whom Bunem had become acquainted with, told him that from time to time wealthy ladies who lived in Uptown would come here, and sometimes they would buy a picture they liked. Bunem heard, and he began to think about the possibility of returning to painting. But he could not spend the last dollars on paints, a palette, and canvas. Painting. The dim light in their apartment wasn't suitable for painting either.

He had plenty of free time, and every day he read the newspaper from cover to cover, including the ads and commercials. Many articles dealt with what was happening in Russia, mainly the struggles of the liberal and socialist parties against the authorities. They organized many strikes, and published illegal leaflets and newspapers. Anarchists occasionally threw bombs and grenades. After the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Stolypin, mass arrests were carried out throughout Russia. Many orators and propagandists from Russia came to America, Germany, and England. They all came to spread information about the situation of the working class around the world and to clarify its problems. Many of the orators were Jews. Some spoke Russian, others Yiddish. They foresaw in advance that the revolution was

imminent. The propagandists and reporters promised that with the victory of the revolution, all the decrees and restrictions imposed on the Jews would be repealed: there would be no more ghettos, Jews would be able to live in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and the Jewish leaders of the revolution would take part in the general government. Many socialists in New York and throughout America were preparing to return to Russia. True, America is supposedly a free country. Here, on May Day, various leftist factions demonstrated. They all carried red flags, made fiery speeches, scorned and cursed the capitalists Rockefeller, Morgan, and Carnegie. They even slandered President William Taft, and no one bothered them. The various writers of the articles and speakers reminded that America was the stronghold of capitalism, and that fundamentally the American reactionaries were no better than the people of the "Black Century" in Russia, the Junkers in Germany, and the conservatives in England.

After its defeat in the Japanese War, Russia formed an alliance with the warmongers in England and France, helping to exacerbate the crisis in the Balkans - a region that the New York columnists and their colleagues in Warsaw called a "powder keg."

Here, in New York, Bunem began to understand Saltesha's claims. She used to talk about the masses of hungry laborers, and Bunem treated her words as a gross exaggeration. In his father's house he was not hungry for bread, although Rabbi Menachem-Mendel lived on a shoestring. The family somehow managed to scrape together the necessary amount for food. The workers and craftsmen on Krochmalena Street - the tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, carters, porters - did not seem starving. Nor did the peasants, who came to the city from the villages in carts loaded with potatoes, beets, carrots, chickens, geese, ducks, cheeses, and mushrooms, suffer the shame of hunger. Well, now, for the first time in his life, Bunem felt the taste of hunger. His and Kayla's few dollars were gone, and the day came when Kayla could not buy groceries to prepare a meal for both of them. Bunem and Kayla couldn't sleep because they were so hungry, and that night they didn't talk about love, but about suicide.

On the more affluent streets—Grand Street, Delancey Street, Clinton Street—women sometimes threw away leftover dry bread and old rolls, and Kayla collected them from the trash cans. Near the market stalls on their street, you could find potatoes, cucumbers, radishes, and sometimes even half-rotten apples or oranges on the sidewalk. Kayla picked out the best ones and brought them home. Sometimes, rummaging through the garbage on the sidewalk, she would find a penny—a cent—or a nickel—that someone had lost. She could see clearly that the prostitutes on Attorn Street were not in short supply. The demand for women’s bodily pleasures did not diminish, and many men came to these homeless girls, even though many businesses and workshops had collapsed due to the economic crisis that prevailed in the country. Kayla repeated that she would rather die than return to a life of disgrace, but Bunem now lives in fear that she will fall back into the web of prostitution without his knowledge.

One hot summer day, as Bunem sat in his underwear writing down the rules of English grammar, the door opened and Kayla came in. She was carrying a full basket, looking happy and excited. She approached Bunem with quick steps, kissed him on the head, and opened the basket wide. “Look what I have!” Bunem saw a basket full of vegetables, fresh bread, and cheese. He asked:

"How did you get that?"

"I found it."

Bunem did not respond immediately. After a long pause he asked again:

"Where did you find it? What's here doesn't look like groceries you'd just find on the street."

"In the markets, all kinds of things fall out of the boxes. And I just picked them up."

Bunem thought for a moment.

"Kayla, this is theft!"

"No, Bunemal. It falls and - - -"

"If something falls, the owners pick it up afterwards. A stranger is not allowed to pick it up for them."

"If I didn't take it, someone else would."

"Let others do what they want. I will not eat stolen food."

"What will you eat? We are penniless."

"It is better to beg for alms, or commit suicide."

Kayla's face contorted.

"Buneml, what will happen?"

"We have to find a job."

"Buneml, you haven't eaten all day. Not even yesterday."

"I'm not hungry."

"You're as pale as death. You yourself said there was no job offer in the newspaper. Is that why we came to America? To die here of hunger? Woe to me and woe to my soul!"

And Kayla burst into tears. She cried like a little girl.

"Kayla, we didn't come to America to be thieves!"

"They're all rich as hell. A whole city could make a living off what they throw away. Lots of things roll around in their trash cans: shoes, dresses, anything you can think of. Bummel, I found money too."

"How much money?"

"A cent and two nickels."

"Did you find it or steal it?"

"If I decided to steal money, I wouldn't just steal eleven cents. Bunamel, I'm an honest man. I'm your faithful wife. Men approach me, try to start a relationship with me. But I give them such a look that they just pick up their feet and walk away. I've never stolen. Never. Not even in those days, you know. Drunkards would come to me and leave their wallets behind. Sometimes their wallets would fall out of their pockets. But I gave them everything back to every one of them. All the whores stole. They would give the guest water, and when he got drunk, they would take the money out of his pockets. They hid this money from their pimps, and because of that they were beaten to death. But I never did anything like that. May I live! If not, I won't come to Israel's grave!"

Bunem had never heard such talk from Kayla. He smiled, despite his distress, and said:

"If you haven't stolen before, don't steal in the future. Maybe God will help us."

"You once said there is no God."

"There is a God, there is. Maybe he's not as good as they say, but he exists."

"Why is he tormenting us so much?"

“Because neither of us had learned any trade. We were both parasites.” Boonem was shaken and moved by his own words.

"What am I going to do with all this food? I don't even know who to return it to. A loaf of bread falls here, a cookie there, an apple. No one bends down to pick up what's fallen. If I go back there and start returning things, I'll end up in prison."

"Eat this."

"Alone? And what will you do?"

"Give me the eleven cents."

Kayla handed the coins to her son, and burst into tears again.

"Don't cry, eat!"

"I can't eat without you!"

"Go downstairs and buy some bread for these eleven cents, and maybe some milk. If you can't get any milk, buy some butter."

"I have a basket full of bread."

"Buy some honest bread. Leave the basket here."

Kayla hesitated for a moment, then said, “Well, so be it.” Bunem gave her back the coins. She rested her head on his shoulder. “I dragged you here!” She burst into tears and let out a loud wail.

After a long search, Bunem got a job: he had to take care of a blind man, spend six hours a day with him and read newspapers, magazines and books to him. The blind man was an elderly Jew of about eighty years old. He lived near his son and his family in the affluent part of the city, on 19th Street, near Fourth Avenue. Bunem was asked to arrive every day at ten in the morning and stay until four in the afternoon, except on Fridays and Saturdays. The old man was a wealthy man, a former fur trader. Among other

things, he dictated his memoirs to Bunem, because his children and grandchildren planned to translate them into English and publish them at their own expense. Bunem was to receive eight dollars a week for his work. For him, this job was a miracle from heaven, although he usually did not believe in miracles. He found the ad in an Orthodox newspaper that a neighbor had thrown in the trash, and not in the newspaper he was used to reading. It was an old newspaper, from four weeks ago, and Bunem was sure that someone had already got the job. He decided to call anyway, and to his delight, he was invited to come. It turned out that many candidates had answered the ad and called, but they did not please the blind old man, Mr. Morris Zuckerman, or Sugarman, as they were called in America. The ad stated that the candidate for the position should know Hebrew and Yiddish, be familiar with Shas and the Poskim, write neat and clear letters, and have good manners. Bunem called, and when he began to speak Yiddish, he was told to wait. After a few minutes, Mr. Sugarman came to the phone. He questioned Bunem at length, and finally ordered him to come. Meanwhile, another "miracle" had occurred: the day before, Kayla had gotten a job at a bakery on the street where they lived. She had to go out on the street and sell pretzels. The owner of the bakery, a baker from Warsaw, baked pretzels that were different from those baked in America. The American pretzels looked as if they had been baked a few days ago, even when they came out of the oven hot. The Polish immigrants did not like these pretzels. They claimed that they were gentile pretzels, baked from coarse flour, bland, and without any Jewish flavor. They complained that the American pretzels were hard as a rock, and could break your teeth. In contrast, The Warsaw baker's bagels were soft, thin on one side and thick on the other, and rolled like a spiral. If Kayla hadn't gotten this job, they wouldn't have had the few pennies to pay for the trip to Mr. Sugarman's house.

For the first time in his life, Bonham saw a wealthy American home: carpets, fine furniture, pictures, maids. Morris Sugarman, a Jew of Polish descent, lived with his widowed daughter who already had grown grandchildren. The old man's study had a bookcase full of books in English, Russian, Polish, and German. He was not completely blind. He had a cataract, which could have been removed surgically. But the old man refused to "lie under the knife," as he put it. He was short, broad, with a white beard, trimmed and well-groomed. His Yiddish was a mixture of English words with quotations from the Gemara and Midrash. He remembered Warsaw from long ago, and mentioned Rabbi Yeshayla Prager, Rabbi Yokele Gesuntheit, and Chaim-Zelig Slonimsky. Before he lost the ability to read, he used to read "Hatsfira." 94 The newspaper was sent to him from Warsaw, and arrived in New York several months late. Morris Sugarman had previously conducted business with great gentlemen and privileged millionaires, such as the Vanderblit family or their representatives. Now he said to Bunem: "Young man, do not lose hope and confidence in yourself. I was as poor as you when I came to America. What reason cannot do, time will do."

Morris Sugarman had already hired someone to read to him. But the fellow had obscene habits. He didn't wipe his nose with a handkerchief, but spat on the floor. No one could read his scrawling handwriting. Morris Sugarman's daughter, Mrs. Wollman, remarked that he had no table manners, for he came from a simple, coarse family. But Bunem liked him at first sight. Everything would have been

perfect if Bunem hadn't had to deceive these gentle people. He couldn't tell them about Kayla. If they heard he had a wife, they would demand he bring her to them so they could get to know her. But Bunem didn't want to, and couldn't, bring someone like Kayla to this aristocratic house. So he lied and said he lived alone. He told the old man and his daughter that he had a bride in Warsaw, and he intended to bring her to America as soon as possible. He can't tell them that his girlfriend is an anarchist locked up in a fortress. God in heaven! His life has gone on in such a way that he couldn't tell anyone the truth.

In August, New York was in a heatwave. Bunem had never experienced such a heatwave. The men walked the streets with their sleeves rolled up and their collars open, without ties. Some wore sandals without socks. The girls and women of the prodigals walked around in scanty clothing, half naked. Children took off their clothes and were left completely naked, except for their underwear. Every day someone turned on the fire hydrant on Attornée Street and the road was flooded with water, like a stream. The children splashed in the murky water, yelling like wild men, splashing and splashing water at the passers-by walking on the sidewalk. Bunem could not go out into the street in just his shirt, and he did not even allow himself to take off his hat or tie. He sweated, and tried to quench his burning thirst by drinking soda water. Sometimes he drank from the taps of the horses that pulled the carts. Kayla tried to dress lightly, like the other women, but Bunem demanded that she cover her exposed parts. No matter what she had been. She had to behave decently. The neighbors sneered and laughed at Bunem when he left the house in a suit with a bra and tie. Everyone warned him that he might get heatstroke. Well, thank God, he and Kayla didn't have to starve, and he had money to pay rent. Kayla put a pitcher of cold lemonade in the icebox. Sometimes, at night, a cool breeze came in through the window from the river or the sea.

Kayla earned a few dollars a week from the bagels she sold. She also received free baked goods. Only someone who has known the taste of real hunger and the fear of being thrown out onto the street with the few belongings knows how good a loaf of bread and a safe bed to rest on at night taste. Only someone who has longed for a woman's body for many years - he, Bunem, had begun to be attracted to women as early as the age of fourteen - knows the pleasure that repeats itself every night, of entering bed with a lustful and loving female who knows how to satisfy a man's desire. He came to her every night with renewed lust. She revealed to him all the secrets and madness of body lust. And perhaps the body and the soul are one? The sexual adventures she described to him aroused in him a mixture of repulsion and lust. He listened furiously, but wanted to hear more. If Spinoza and the Kabbalists are right in their claim that all that exists is a part of God, flesh of His flesh and bone of His selfhood, then there is no such thing as disgust and repulsion. If all emotions are modes 95 the divine being, there must be a significant purpose in every manifestation of instinctive desire, even if it is lesser and inferior in its means of realization. Kayla - despite her ignorance of intellectual matters - was endowed with intelligence and deep knowledge of everything that concerns human emotions and their manifestations. Passions and desires, which seemed to Bunem such wild madness that he was ashamed to say them to himself, had already been the lot of others who came before him. The human race experiences a tension

between the aspiration to transcendence and the willingness to descend to the bottom and sink into the quicksand of a slushy swamp. Where Kayla came from, people were completely stripped bare: not only in body, but also in soul. We might call it by other names, but a person teeters between exaltation and baseness. There is a force that pulls us downward, and if we don't stand up against it, we sink into the abyss of impurity.

A demon or demon of evil whispers in every ear and promises pleasures out of this world. But the evil inclination only promises and never keeps its word. Kayla herself admitted that in the days when she was rolling in filth and indulging in strange pleasures and amusements, her life was full of sorrow and regret. Now, her greatest happiness is to be with Bunem. Here, on Etorni Street. But she gains this happiness illegally, because she is still Jarma's wife, not Bunem's. Every day the ships bring thousands of immigrants from Warsaw and all over Poland. Every day someone might recognize her on the street and tell the neighbors who and what she is. Every time she goes out into the street, disaster can strike. Well, what if Saltesha is released from prison and comes to America? Kayla remembered that Bunem had not promised to stay with her. He did not want to have a child with her. By law, any child born to her and their son would be a bastard. She herself, Kayla, was and remains a bundle of sins and filth...

D

For a few weeks they had some rest. Dr. Weltscher returned from England, and Kayla returned to serve him. In the evenings she went out to sell pretzels. Bunem traveled every day to his place of work at Mr. Morris Sugarman's. Both father and daughter treated him as one of the family. They invited him to lunch and dinner with them, and even revealed to him their worries and the family's secrets. Morris Sugarman and his daughter began to say that there was no point in Bunem continuing to live on Attornée Street and traveling to 19th Street and back every day. Their apartment had many rooms, more than the father and daughter needed. Bunem could live with them. They would not charge him rent, nor would they pay for the meals he ate at their table. They had a servant and a maid. Mrs. Wollman, Morris Sugarman's daughter, ran a kosher kitchen. She cooked for herself and her father. How much did it cost to cook for another person?

Their family knew several tragedies. One of the daughters, the youngest, converted to Christianity and married an immigrant from Denmark, an engineer by profession. She lived with her husband in Boston, and Maurice Sugarman erased her name from his heart. He did not consider her a daughter and did not want to hear about the grandchildren, whom he considered to be complete gentiles. Another daughter married a Jew, but he turned out to be an adventurer and a swindler, and in the end he was put in prison. Because of these troubles, and perhaps for other reasons, Maurice Sugarman's wife fell ill with cancer

and died. And if that were not enough, their son did something unbecoming of a Jew: he volunteered for military service. He already had a high rank, but what kind of purpose was that? How could a young Jewish man be a regular soldier? This son knew very little about Judaism. He served somewhere in Texas, not far from the border with Mexico. The eldest daughter, Bessie Wellman, the one who lives with her father, was widowed six years ago. She has a daughter in Philadelphia. This daughter has several children, and is also a widow.

Morris Sugarman got very little satisfaction from his children and grandchildren, but he blamed himself for it. In the past, when he was still young, he had devoted himself too much to business and had not spent time with his children. He did not give them a Jewish education worthy of his name, allowed them to attend gentile schools, and they grew up cut off from Judaism. Only the eldest daughter, Bessie (her Jewish name was Bella-Baraka), knew how to speak Yiddish and kept kosher. In a way, Morris Sugarman also blamed his late wife Hilda. The girl was the daughter of a German Jew, a partner in a Brooklyn bank. In her parents' home, she was treated disdainfully towards orthodox Jews, especially Jews of Eastern European descent, and could not forgive her husband for speaking English with a Yiddish accent. She did not stop scolding him and correcting errors in his English pronunciation. Maurice Sugarman revealed to Bonham that as long as his wife was alive, he could not keep his Yiddish books in a bookcase with glass panels. The girl was afraid that their guests would see the Jewish titles on the book covers. And not only that: at every opportunity she would throw his Hebrew magazines and newspapers into the trash. She called the new Jewish immigrants anti-Semitic derogatory names, such as "Kayks" 96 or "anarchists." His daughter Bessie learned Yiddish to a proper degree only after her husband died and she moved in with her father and managed his household.

Bunem could not get a word out of his mouth when Morris Sugarman and his daughter Bessie offered him to come live with them. But he immediately found an excuse: he wanted to live in a Jewish environment, and not in a remote area where most of the residents were Gentiles. He did not want to give up his job as a teacher and instructor, because it was important to him that Jewish children in America would not forget their Judaism. Thus he presented himself to his father and daughter as an idealist loyal to his Judaism, although he remembered Lincoln's words that it was impossible to fool all the people all the time. Bunem knew that his lie would be discovered sooner or later. He was also not sure how long his job here would last. An eighty-year-old man would not live many more years. In addition to cataracts, Morris Sugarman had a heart condition. He had - he said - only one wish: that the Lord of the universe would allow him to finish dictating his memoirs.

Shortly afterwards, another complication arose: when Bunem arrived in America and rented the apartment on Etorni Street, he sent a letter to Saltesza's mother in Warsaw, giving his address in New York. His letter went unanswered at the time, and Bunem concluded that her parents wanted nothing to do with him. He kept thinking about Saltesza, even though he despaired of knowing how she was doing.

How could it be? Prisoners in the fortress were not allowed to write letters. Saltesza's mother must have told her daughter on one of her visits that Bunem had gone to America with some dubious woman. Bunem had lost Saltesza and was beginning to get used to the idea that he was going to spend the years in America with Kayla, Jarma's wife. Yes. All he wanted now was to pass the years. He no longer tried to paint, and he had lost the desire to write. I just need to feel like I'm stranded on a deserted island like Robinson Crusoe, or Captain Scott (recently, all the newspapers have been writing about Captain Scott's tragic death on his way to the South Pole) - a thought crossed his mind.

One morning the postman brought a letter from Warsaw. At first Bunem thought his sister Cirla had written to him. But he immediately saw the name Irena Buchbinder on the envelope. The letter was written in Polish, and was from Saltesa's mother. It read:

Dear Mr. Bonam Tomashuber,

This letter is written by Stasha's mother. 97 Stasha was very ill, and was lying in hospital. That is why I could not give her what you wrote. I also had no head for such things. I saw how you went and with whom you left for America, and I judged that the chapter in your relationship with your daughter was over. It must end, too. But God was with us, and Stasha is feeling better. The doctors sent her to Russia, to breathe fresh air in an area where the air is clean and pure. Stasha is now flooding me with letters, begging me to contact you, because now there is hope that you will recover completely soon, and perhaps you will be able to reach the Golden Land. She writes with such intense emotion and so much longing that I have decided to give you her address. The address is written below, at the end of the letter. But I warn you and command you to write to her only if your love for my daughter has not waned and if you are a free man, and have nothing to do with that woman. I am convinced that you do not deserve my daughter's great love. But those who at least get to be loved, grow stronger in their love. I pray for your well-being and wish you all the best in the new land.

Yours, Irena Buchbinder.

The letter made everything clear: Saltesha had been exiled to Siberia instead of standing trial. She lived in a small village in the Arkhangelsk region. Bunem knew how the deported prisoners lived there: they were thrown into some remote hole, among rude and primitive peasants, under constant police surveillance. The Yiddish newspapers in New York had many articles about deportees who had finished serving their sentences, or had managed to escape and reach America. Everyone who described life in those places repeated the same thing: the conditions of life in prison were much better. There was not

so much filth in the prison, the food was better, and political prisoners were also given books from the prison library. Most of the books in the prison library were confiscated from the prisoners, so sometimes the prisoners also came across works that had been banned by the censorship.

Kayla was not at home when Bunem received the letter from Poland, and he decided not to say a word to her or tell her that Saltesha had been exiled to Siberia. Why rob her of her peace? But Irena Buchbinder's words rekindled his love for Saltesha. In truth, he thought about her all the time. It was good to spend the nights with Kayla, but Kayla was not and could not be his life partner. He could not introduce her to any company. He could not take her to reading evenings or to the theater, because there might always be someone there who knew her in Warsaw. Besides, she could not understand any speech and showed no interest in serious plays. It was enough for her to go out into the street to sell bagels. Only two things interested her: running the household, and him - Bunem. preparing his meals, washing his clothes, taking care of his health and satisfying his lust. Bunem forbade Kayla from drinking liquor, but once she earned money, she would occasionally buy a bottle of whiskey, and even imported Russian whiskey. Kayla became confident when she sipped a glass, and sometimes she would even get wild and start talking to all the colorful guests of the underworld.

Sometimes she even made a mistake and called Bunem Yarma. Sometimes she chatted wildly and shamelessly told about her adventures with Blind Icha, with Pivele the pickpocket and other such types. She often spoke of her desire to have a child for Bunem, but he shuddered at the idea of having offspring with Kayla. He usually thought it was madness to have children, because it was a continuation of human tragedy. He often thought that sooner or later he would find the courage to end his life. Thus would come an end to all the complications he had brought upon himself and his aversion to evil in the world: the cruelty of life, the struggle for existence, the blindness of sexual desire, the injustice of the authorities, madness, crime, the false hopes of those who believe that there are means to overcome nature and the principle that identifies might with justice. Well, but a man's mind is a tyrant, which forced Bunem to think about Saltshe. In his imagination he saw her sitting in the bitter cold of the remote village, curled up in a padded coat and a thick scarf, and waiting with all his heart for a letter, a greeting from home, a newspaper, a book, a person with whom one could exchange a word, a café, a theater, and also for contact with him - with Bunem. He still continued to pay the shipping company for his and Kayla's tickets, and even managed to promise Cirla that he would send her a ticket. He was like a leaf blown by the wind, but others pinned their hopes on him and built their future on him.

The month of Elul was approaching, and all the neighbors, the women of Eternie Street, argued to Kayla that a Jewish woman must purchase a place for herself in the synagogue so that she could pray in public on the high days, hear a cantor, listen to the rabbi's sermon, and blow the shofar. Some of these women knew how to pray with a prayer book from their old home, and others recited the prayers translated into English. Kayla spoke of her desire to pray in the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and even

bought herself a holiday dress. She demanded that Bunem also visit the synagogue. But Bunem was not inclined to pray to God, who is always silent, silences all injustice, and ignores the suffering of the creatures he created. Why turn to Him and ask Him for favors, if He is silent and acts as He wills in every situation? Bunem tried to explain his opinion to Kayla, but she argued against him: "Everyone prays. I want to pray too. If I don't, all the women will speak ill of me."

Morris Sugarman and his daughter began to talk about Bunem's desire to come to them for the holidays. Morris Sugarman was a member of a modern community, and in their synagogue, liberal professionals and great gentlemen prayed. He suggested that Bunem join him in prayer in his synagogue. But Bunem had to refuse. He was forced to pretend to be an atheist, even though he believed in the existence of God and even in divine providence. He could not elaborate on his explanations to the old man, who was hard of hearing and had poor eyesight. Above all, he had difficulty explaining the point of departure of someone who believed in God and yet felt the need to ignore His commands and protest against His ways of leading the world.

Bunem wrote Saltesha a long letter in Polish and sent it to the small village to which she had been exiled, even though he did not believe that the letter would reach its destination. He wrote to her that he loved her and dreamed of being with her. He did not mention, not even in a hint, that he was living with another woman. Was he acting correctly? Wasn't he deceiving Saltesha, Kayla, and himself in this way? Well, but he cannot explain to Saltesha what he is doing and how he lives. The writers of the laws did not take into account the stormy sea that stirs the soul of a person. With them, everything is either right or wrong. The Christians imposed sexual commands and prohibitions on the human race that are incompatible with human nature. He, Bunem, yearned for both Saltesha and Kayla. But Saltesha would not be able to understand this, despite her revolutionary nature and the education she had acquired. On the other hand, Kayla was able to understand such a situation.

The High Holy Days arrived. Kayla bought herself a place in the synagogue, next to the prayer leader who read the prayers to the women who could not read. But Bunem stayed at home. On East Broadway there was a public library that had books in various languages, in addition to English: Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, Polish, German. Bunem enrolled in the library, and often sat there and read. He read very few books on philosophy, because he realized that the ideas of the philosophers were no wiser than the innovations of the rabbis. Therefore, he preferred to read travel books, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies. Sometimes he read popular science books in various fields: physics, chemistry, biology, and even astronomy. Here were translations of the research of Palmarian, a French astronomer who in recent years had become interested in supernatural phenomena. The ether, which was supposed to connect the luminous heavenly bodies, faded away and is no more. The vastness of the universe was revealed in its surprising extent and antiquity. Scientists did not stop discovering new galaxies. Scientific journals mentioned terms that Bunme had never heard of before. Not only radium, but also other elements had

been emitting rays of light for hundreds of thousands of years. The spectroscope showed that the universe was made up of the same materials found on the surface of the earth. What was called "nature" became more and more mysterious and wonderful. More and more scientists studied and interpreted nature and its laws. The atom was no longer considered the smallest part of matter. The atom itself was made up of a combination of matter and energy. New studies on hysteria and nervous diseases appeared, and alongside them - books on sex and sexual perversions.

Bunem read what he could get his hands on and what he could understand. He kept writing down new words in English. One thing—mathematics, “the language of nature,” according to Immanuel Kant—was missing for him to properly understand scientific research. So he borrowed textbooks on algebra and geometry, and tried to learn what others had known and understood hundreds and thousands of years before him. But Bunem only discovered Euclid and Archimedes in the twentieth century.

Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin (1862 - 1911) was the Prime Minister of Russia from 1906 to 1911, during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II. He introduced far-reaching reforms, but he was harsh and murderous towards opponents of the regime and also issued harsh decrees against the Jews. He had many enemies, and in September 1911 he was assassinated at the entrance to the Kiev Opera House.

An important newspaper that appeared in Warsaw from 1862 to 1931. The newspaper was founded by Chaim - Zelig Slonimski. It first appeared as a weekly, and only after a few years was a license obtained to publish it as a daily newspaper. In the first stage, under Slonimski's editorship, the newspaper focused on the life of Jews in the diaspora. In the second stage of its activity, under the editorship of Nahum Sokolow, the newspaper took on a national - Zionist character.

Bashevis - Singer was greatly influenced by Spinoza's teachings, and he attributes to Bunem his reflections, according to which every creature contains a modification of a divine being and its infinite power.

A derogatory name created because Jewish immigrants who could not sign immigration forms marked a circle (instead of a cross) in place of a signature. Hence the nickname kike - a corruption of cake .

The mother uses her daughter's underground name, and later - underground codes. She is probably afraid of censorship. Despite the intimate content, she addresses her daughter in the third person, according to the rules of Polish etiquette.

Chapter Nine

A

One day during the holocaust of Sukkot, Kayla returned from her job at Dr. Waltzer's and approached the door of her house. Suddenly, she heard someone calling her name. Kayla flinched. It was Max, Yarma's friend. He, and none other than him, appeared in a knit suit, a stiff hat, and white shoes. A colorful tie with a pearl in a loop was tied around the stiff collar of his shirt. Max leaned with one hand on the silver-handled cane he always carried, and in the other he held a cigarette that he had just taken from his lips. Kayla was startled and fell silent. Max said sarcastically: "It turns out that if you wait, you win." Kayla tried to run away, but she immediately realized that she had nowhere to go. Max was standing by her house. He had learned where she lived. So she stopped and said: "What do you want from me? I have a husband." Max grinned: "A husband, huh? "I thought Yarma was your husband." The words rolled out of his mouth like peas. Kayla's face contorted.

"What are you doing to me? This is America, not Warsaw."

"I know this is America," Max replied angrily. "What did you think? If you ran away to the land of Columbus, no one would know where you were? Me, I have spies everywhere. Is that what you do? Run away with a rabbi's beloved son? What will you become, a rabbi?"

"Max, I love him, not Yarma. If Yarma wants a divorce, I will willingly agree. He can't get more than that from me."

"Get, huh? What's a get? A piece of paper. Yarma wants you, not a get."

"May he remain willingly."

"You must be pretending to be a pure woman, a pure soul," Max reasoned. "But very quickly everyone here would know who you are and where you were reincarnated. If he is the son of a rabbi, and himself a teacher and instructor, how is it that he got up and ran away with a promiscuous woman who has a

husband?" Max grinned and changed his tone. "He's probably a crook too. A righteous man in a fur coat..."

"He loves me and I love him!" Kayla cried. "I've suffered enough all these years. You, go your way and I'll go mine."

"Don't worry, I'll go the way I choose. Just don't breathe on my neck. Get off me. I'm not afraid of cops. Not the cops in Warsaw, and certainly not the cops in New York. I'm even less afraid of them. Listen to what I'm saying to you, and answer me: Is your mandrake at home?"

"I don't know. I just got back from the doctor."

"Are you sick?"

"I work for him."

"What do you have to do at a doctor's? Enemas for the sick?"

"I'm his maid. I work for him part-time."

"Half a day, huh? And what do you do the other half of the day? Saying Psalms?"

"I sell bagels, and I run our household."

"Well, you did well in the land of gold! Piff-piff! I've been standing here for over an hour. I saw there's a whorehouse across the street. You're getting some little fuck there, huh?"

"Max, go on your way!"

"And if not, what will you do? Pour salt on my tail? Listen, Kayla. I don't want to cause a riot here, even though this little street is a replica of Krokhmalna Street. I'm going to tell you the obvious: you tricked Yarma and left. You also blew up at me. Yarma got drunk because of you. He exploded with anger and pain, and wanted to commit suicide. What did you think? That you would run away to America, and no one would ever touch you again? But what do you say? A woman and a promissory note never go away. How come you got involved with a bum, a rabbi's son? This guy has a sister, Tsirla, and she blurted things out to someone, and that someone told everything. A whole kakmika, a story with some anarchist who was put in the citadel and I don't know what. I went to the sister, showed her the gun and she spilled everything. Yarma is here."

"Huh? Where?"

"Here, in New York. He's getting sick because of you. You won't recognize him when you see him. Don't forget he's your husband."

"He is not my husband. He loves male sex, and he doesn't need a wife."

"He needs it, he needs it. We can't keep standing here, in the heat of the street. It's Sukkot now, but it's as hot as Shavuot. Come with me somewhere. We'll eat something, and maybe grab a drink to go with it."

"Where to go? Bunem is waiting for me."

"Kayla, you're coming with me. I won't kidnap you or put you in a sack. Come with me to the saloon. Here they call it a 'salon.'"

"Where? Leave me alone."

"Kayla, you better come with me."

Max grabbed her arm. He gripped it tightly, and Kayla barely managed to keep from screaming in pain.

"Remove the claws!"

"You'd better come. If not - - -"

"Where is it, huh?"

"Not far from here. On Grand Street."

"Boonem didn't know where I was."

"I repeat: Come with me immediately, or you will see black in your eyes!"

"I have to say something to them."

"not!"

For a while they both stood in silence, until Kayla asked:

"How long will you keep me there?"

"Don't be afraid. I'm not your enemy. If you don't play tricks, I'll take you home."

"People are already looking at us!"

"Come on, move already!"

Max threw away the cigarette, put his hand in his pocket, and said:

"Blind Icha sends you greetings."

"Does he know I'm here?"

"Everyone already knows."

Kayla raised her head and glanced out her apartment window.

"Max, you can't get anything out of me by force. If you want to kill me, kill me now. I don't want to live like this. Death is a thousand times better than a life like this."

"I won't murder you. We'll just talk like brother and sister. You're beautiful in America. You also look younger. This Hasid is probably doing you good. Come on, get up!"

on

They reached Delancey Street and entered the tavern. The place resembled Eliezer's tavern at 17 Kruchmalena Street, and yet it was different. A few men sat on high stools near the bar and drank beer and whiskey. They were all talking at once. They seemed to be talking to the wall, which was crammed with shelves of all kinds of drinks. The many bottles with labels stuck on them reminded Kayla of a pharmacy. Around them were tables covered with red tablecloths. On each table stood bowls of

chickpeas, beans, sauerkraut, and pickles, and next to them - baskets of rolls and hard-boiled eggs. Between the tables were wandering women with hairy bodies, and Kayla immediately recognized that they were like her, of the same sex.

They were heavily made up: their eyes were outlined in dark frames, and their cheeks were painted with bright blush. The whores crawled among the men like annoying flies. When they saw Max enter with a woman, they began to wink and make obscene gestures. Max pointed to a chair and invited Kayla to sit down. He himself sat down in the way he always did - on the edge of the seat - lit a cigarette and smoked. Kayla sat and didn't say a word. She herself had once been a promiscuous woman, and people took her to taverns. But here - with all the whores lurking for customers, with the smells and loud voices of the drunk and half-drunk men - she felt so sick that she could barely hold back from vomiting. Max chose a hard-boiled egg for himself and took a full bite. He turned to Kayla and said:

"Eat. Here you get it for free."

"Free?"

"Ah, I see you're still a rookie. Totally green. Yes, free. This is New York. Not Warsaw."

A waiter approached them, and Max ordered a drink for himself and Kayla. He spoke English, and didn't ask Kayla what she wanted to drink. The waiter immediately left, and Max asked:

"How did you meet this foolish follower, the son of the teacher-teacher? Speak clearly."

"Max, I met him and he pulled me out of the mud. I'll never go back and fall into it again. Never."

"Slime, huh? You're already talking like an intelligent woman. That must be his style. Listen to me," Max changed his tone, "Yarma is here, and he's your husband. Even among the righteous, a husband has a right to his wife. Your scheming brat is a scholar who spent a lot of time on the bench in the Beit Midrash. I'm not just some rude brat who knows nothing either. You know that in the holy books it says that a husband is allowed to treat his wife as if she were a piece of meat bought at a butcher's. 98 Here in

America, women have become very polite. Refined ladies. Every Yakhne thinks of herself as a lady of Solomon. But that's not worth a grain of dust. Here, a married woman living with a strange man can easily get into a mess. I know everyone there is to know. Kayla, I'll take you to Yarma. He wanted to come with me and give you a decent portion. But I stopped him. I don't want any scandal. He's about to start "To beat. I want everything to go smoothly, without riots."

"Max, I won't go to Yarama. It's a waste of time. If he wants a divorce - - -"

"Kayla, if this doesn't go well, it will go by force and it will be very bad."

"You can kill me right now. But Bunem is my husband, and I am his wife. In the eyes of God and man."

"Maybe in the eyes of people. But not in the eyes of God. God knows you have a ketubah with Yarma."

"I won't go to Yerma. You can lay me down dead right now. Here, in the tavern. I'm not afraid to die."

"Well, well. Pouring out, huh? Kayla, think about everything. I know what love is. No less than you do. But a person needs to have a head, not just a heart. That bastard won't be with you much longer. He has a bride, and she'll be here sooner or later. He's holding you as long as it's convenient for him. But when she comes, he'll send you to hell. My name's not Max if I'm just talking like that, in the air. I've checked everything out. I even talked to her mother. She already knows who you are and everything. Where are you going when he shows you the way out? Yarma wants to be your husband, not just your pimp. I want you to know that we're only stopping here for a few weeks. We're going to Brazil, Argentina. You better listen and remember. We didn't come empty-handed. Our pockets are full. If Yarma hadn't been so crazy about you, he could have gotten the most beautiful female and started a life with her. But he misses you. The three of us together could "To conquer the world. I saw the house you live in. Half a ruin. We're staying in a big hotel on 42nd Street, Times Square. If you're not stupid, you'll eat delicacies all your life, like an important guest in a sukkah."

"Max, no."

"Is that your last word?"

"My last word. Even if I die tomorrow."

"I can harm you. Here and now. But I don't want to shed blood, as they say. Yerma will pay you a visit, and he is hot-tempered. If I were him, I would throw you into the penitentiary. But he, when he is angry, is ready to cut off heads."

"I only have one head, and he can cut it off."

"Well, well. He'll do whatever he wants. I'm just a messenger here. Take a sip."

"I won't drink."

"True justice. Sarah, the second daughter of Tobim. That's something, too, at least."

"I won't eat either."

"A hard-boiled egg is a kosher food. Provided there is no drop of blood in it. If there is a drop of blood, it is in the white part. Not in the yolk."

"I don't want to eat."

"No, then no. You're a tough nut to crack. Does your lover know who you are and what kind of filth you've been involved in?"

"He knows everything."

"If he doesn't know, I'll have a few words with him and tell him everything."

"Leave them alone. He spits on people like you."

"He'll spit on you, not on me. If you spit on me, you'll immediately start spitting blood and pus."

"Leave him alone."

"I'll do what I understand, not what you tell me to do. Well, like I told you, I'm just a messenger boy. Yarma knows your address, and I'm not responsible for what he does. If he wants revenge or does something stupid, that's his problem. His headache, as they say in America. You have a chance to be happy: go on a trip, dress like a princess, drink champagne and have a good time. Yarma is crazy about you. He loves you, and I don't hate you either. We could have a blast until sparks fly. But if you prefer a golem from a Hasidic seminary, one who has another bride, do what you want. If Yarma does something bad to you, don't come to me complaining. I can leave you both and go my way. Crazy!"

Max tapped with two fingers, and the tapping sound sounded like a gunshot.

"Yes, Max. Everything should be between us. You don't interfere."

"No, then no. How is he, your Bonamel, in bed? Does he have a lot of strength?"

"He is a human being."

"When you get a bullet in the head, you stop being human."

"Max, get out of here!"

"This is not your salon. If you want, run. Earn what you do. But I'll be in Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires by now. New York is just a stopover for me. We're bringing some nice chaps with us. Young and beautiful, full of health. Blood and milk. My plan was to keep the goods for ourselves, and you'll be the madam. But since you're going to be a kosher Jewess, a holy soul, we'll pass the goods on to someone else. I might find myself another madam. Women are after me. They're all wrapped around my neck. What they find in me, I'll never know."

"What kind of women? Probably your kind."

"All sorts. I don't even have to persuade them. They all want to escape from the small towns. From Warsaw too. Nicholas, our nice Emperor of Russia, has got himself a muzhik named Rasputin. This rude peasant gives him all sorts of advice, and on top of that he sleeps with the Empress. Maybe even with the Emperor himself. There is a complete mess in Russia now. There will be another revolution there, such that the riots of 1905 will be child's play compared to it. Rivers of blood will be shed there. Our Jews are stirring up the Gentiles and stirring up a spirit of rebellion in them. But when things come to fruition, they themselves will be the scapegoat. Doesn't your idiot read newspapers?"

"He reads, and he knows everything. He reads the thickest books."

"What do books know? Everything they say happens exactly the opposite. Writers have a head, but I have eyes. They, like a blind horse, stumble over pits and bumps. I'll taste a drop."

Max poured himself a glass. He took a sip, ate an egg, and put the glass down.

"They let you chew for free. But there's nothing free in the world. The chickpeas are salty and peppery, and after you eat them, you want to drink. That's where their profit comes from. Trust the Americans. They know how to get by. Most of all, they know how to cheat you out of the few dollars you have. It's a world where everyone looks out for themselves. Everyone wants to fix the other, and in the end, everyone turns out to be a sucker. When the emperors can't continue to make fun of the public with lies, they start waging wars and sending soldiers who will sacrifice their lives for them. These fools go to battle, and God created a lot of fools. Isn't that right?"

"Max, I have to go home."

"Go, may you have a smooth and good journey."

third

Kayla didn't know the way back from Delancey Street to Eternie Street, and had to go back and ask for directions. The street was crowded, and because of the noise she could barely hear what was being said. The news vendors were loudly announcing the Yiddish newspapers they were holding. Men were standing in circles arguing loudly about something they insisted on. In all the din of words, the only word that could be heard was "strike." Oh, the revolutionary instigators are starting to work here too, Kayla told herself, and she stopped for a moment to think about what had happened to her. Yerma is in New York. He knows her address. Today or tomorrow he might burst in on her with a gun. Kayla raised her eyes to the sky: God in heaven, please don't let him do anything bad to Bunem! I'll be his scapegoat, his scapegoat! A shiver ran down her spine with fear. Should she tell Bunem everything? He might, God forbid, fall ill from anxiety! He might run away somewhere and leave her alone! God, merciful Father! May this murderer's hands shrink and wither. If he intends to ruin her life, may all the plagues of Egypt come upon him! On him and on that thief, that despicable robber, lame Max! Kayla vowed in her heart that she would give a living to the poor if God would answer her prayer and protect her. The more her love for Bunem grew, the more her hatred for Yerma burned within her. Oh, how is this possible? - Kayla wondered, I had once loved him so much!

She glanced at the Brooklyn Bridge. This bridge had been built not long ago, and the neighbors on Eternie Street spoke highly of its praise and wonders. They also dug tunnels in the hard rock soil, and subways ran through them. They built tall houses, twenty stories high and more. Well, but in this rich city there was no shortage of beggars, cripples who lay in doorways and begged for alms. The homeless girls on Eternie Street and in the surrounding alleys sold their bodies for pennies. She herself, Kayla, was happy when she earned fifty cents one evening for the bagel she sold. She had to sell a lot of bagels to make that kind of profit.

The Jews in America did not forget God, and erected Sukkots wherever possible: on the roofs, small balconies, and even on the landing of the emergency stairs. These were tiny Sukkots, and the Warsaw Sukkots were real palaces in comparison. Here they did not use braided thatch like in Warsaw, but a certain type of twigs. No sounds of holiday songs came from these Sukkots. It seems that the occupants of the Sukkot sneaked inside and secretly held the holiday meal. On the other streets, near Uptown, it

was a little dangerous. Irish scoundrels threw stones at the Sukkots, and even at synagogues and apartments where a minyan had gathered for prayer. If an old Jew passed by on the street, the scoundrels shouted insults at him. More than once they tried to pull out his beard. On every street there was a local gang - groups of Jewish scoundrels or ruffians, who fought each other with sticks and iron rods. Some were armed with knives and guns. Neighbors told Kayla that high-ranking New York thugs had conspired with gangsters, and collected protection fees from the owners of brothels and strip clubs. They did not spare small business owners and market stalls either. If they were not paid their weekly protection fees, they would pour oil or gasoline on the goods. They had no problem attacking and stabbing. The police ignored them, because they all took bribes - "money will not cut it." 100 Even the judges were bribed. When election time came, the gangs bought votes for the candidate they liked. It didn't take much: a dime or a beer can would do. Bunem argued to Kayla: "That's how it is everywhere in the world. The powerful do what they want. All their laws and judgments are designed only to help criminals." Kayla now saw clearly how right he was. That's why Max can speak with the arrogance of someone who fears no one. Even the most aggressive thieves on Krochmalena Street have not reached such a level of arrogance.

Kayla returned home to find Bunem sitting and reading a book. As always, he wrote down words in English and put the notes in a cigar box. He had already accumulated half a dozen such boxes. He had even begun to speak English. It was not the same English Kayla had heard on Attornée Street. He pronounced the words a little differently. Sometimes, when Kayla memorized English words, Bunem would correct her mistakes. He had studied English at a course organized by the city's Adult Education Department. There, new immigrants were taught to speak good English, according to the rules of grammar - the language in which books were written.

“Why did you come so late today?” asked Bunem. Kayla couldn’t answer. A lump of bile stuck in her throat. Suddenly she burst out in a scream:

"Bunem!, we're lost! Let's get out of here!"

"What happened?"

Kayla tried to speak, but a bitter sob burst from her throat. Her face turned red and was washed with tears. The words stuck in her mouth. After a while, Bunem realized what had happened. Yarma, her ex-husband, was here. More than once, Bunem had thought that such a thing might happen, but he treated this possibility as one of the hallucinations that teased him in his bed at night in some kind of illusion

game. But sometimes hallucinations come true with strange speed. The moment he heard that Max had scared Kayla and the drunk Yarma carrying a gun, Bunem was overcome with paralyzing fear. Kayla asked in a tearful voice:

"What shall we do? Let's run away somewhere!"

"Where will we escape to, and how will we escape? We have barely enough to survive."

"You once said there was this kind of village where Jewish farmers worked."

"You mean the commune? Ah, there used to be such a thing and now it doesn't exist anymore. Everyone there wanted to fix the world. But they started fighting, and the commune fell apart. There was an article about them in the newspaper once. It's interesting, but even if there was such a place, it's not right for me."

"What shall we do?"

"First of all, stop crying. Crying won't help us."

"It's my fault. I got you into all this trouble. I already know what to do."

"What do you know? Tell me."

"No. I won't tell you. I'll leave here. And if he comes, tell him I'm not here. I don't want you to risk your life because of me. You brought me to America, and that's enough. I'll go wherever my eyes show me and wherever my feet lead me. No one will know where my bones have rolled. Your Saltsha will come to you soon. She suits you. She'll be a good wife for you. She's a smart girl. She knows a book. No one chases her here. And me? I'm like a bitch that all the dogs chase."

"Where are you going? What's wrong with you?"

"I don't know where. I only want one thing: that you remember me well. I'm going to pack a package for myself."

"You won't do that! It won't help either. If he comes and you're not here, he'll think I've hidden you somewhere. He'll demand that I tell him where you are, and - - -"

"What can I do? Bunemal, you told me that the old man - what's his name? - and his daughter wanted you to live with them. Go to them, I'll manage somehow."

"He could still harm you."

"I'll come at him with a knife. I saw a long, sharp knife in the store. It's probably still with the dealer. If he wants it by force, then so am I. I'm not some kind of spoiled lady who only knows how to whine. I'll stick the knife right down his throat."

"Oh, Kayla!"

"Go to them immediately!"

"They'll be surprised, why am I suddenly...?"

"They'll be surprised. I won't wait until he starts with his tricks. Bunemal, I had a similar thing once. Some guy dressed up on me and tried to be a dude, and burst into my room in the middle of the night. But I made myself a heavy oaken axe and hid it under my pillow. Before he could even open his mouth, I gave him a straight punch in the face. He collapsed completely. He'll remember this for the tenth generation. Bunemal, where did you hide the Yish? I have to take a sip - - -"

"Not now. He won't come right away. And I, I can't surprise people and just fall for them. I have to wait until tomorrow."

"He might come today. Whatever. I'm going to buy the knife. I saw it in a shop on Orchard Street. There was a hammer there too. Bonham, I'll be right back."

"Don't do anything you'll regret later."

"He'll regret it, not me. Give me a sip."

Bunem hesitated, but handed her the bottle. She snatched the bottle from his hand and began to sip. She gulped quickly, and the drink flowed down her throat with a loud gurgle. Bunem looked at her in amazement. His gloomy gaze was mingled with suppressed laughter. There were days and weeks when he forgot that he was living with someone from the underworld. She behaved gently and with quiet submission, like a devoted and loyal woman. And then, suddenly, the Cossack who had been dormant inside her woke up. Her face changed as she sipped. They turned red, and her greenish-blue eyes looked at him aggressively and full of belligerent joy. She drank the drink to the brim, and finally threw the bottle away like a peasant in a tavern. The empty bottle fell on the bed, and Kayla called out: "Listen, I'll be back soon. Lock the door. Don't let anyone in!"

Bunem heard her running down the stairs. He closed the door and bolted it. A moment later he went back to reading. He came across an English word he didn't know, looked it up in the dictionary and wrote it down on a piece of paper that he later put in a cigar box. In the midst of the danger that awaited him, he continued to wonder about the depths of the English language, its richness and precision. What did Bunem care if he was lost in both worlds - this world and the next?

D

The day passed, and Viarma did not appear. Kayla laid the knife and the hammer on the table. Bunem's heart was filled with a silent prayer to the Lord of the Universe, even though he had long since decided not to ask anything of God. Now he prayed that the night would pass without terrible scandals, and he begged the King of Kings to protect Kayla and keep her from all harm. Not to kill, and not to be killed. As always, Kayla bathed and combed her hair before she went to bed. Bunem tried to read by the light of

the gas lamp, but everything spun before his eyes and he put the book down. He lived with a prostitute. Some pimp, a murderer, preparing to come to him with a gun. How low could one sink? How low could a person reach? Kayla turned off the lamp and joined him. She seemed to have fallen onto the bed, and Bunem immediately smelled alcohol. The drink aroused Kayla, and she pounced on him with the lust of a drunk. Her face was hot and her body almost burned his. She bit his lips and roared with lust: "My giant, one and only! I want to die for you! I am ready to murder for you, to shed blood, to rot in prison! I am yours, yours, yours! No man is allowed to touch my body. Take me! Take me! Cut me into pieces!..." She screamed loudly, and Bunem was forced to block her mouth with his hands. Her screams would still be heard throughout the street. The neighbors would still chase them. Kayla continued hers. Drunkenness had awakened in her the gibberish of a brothel. Expressions that Bunem had never heard before escaped her mouth. Her lust infected him, but even at the height of her passion, the thought crossed his mind that Yiddish was also a rich language. It has an immense wealth of words. Not just English.

Kayla fell asleep and slept soundly after satisfying her desire. She let out a single snore, and then there was silence. But Bunem could not fall asleep, and for a long hour he lay awake and pondered. Ever since he had become educated and moved to a new environment, he had heard mocking attacks on Yiddish from all sides. They threw fire and brimstone at it, calling it jargon, mish-mash, a tasteless jumble. The educated spoke in condemnation of Yiddish and compared it to a slave. In the eyes of the Zionists, Yiddish was considered a language of exile. They were certain that the Jews would cast off the disgrace of exile that had stained their lives, and abandon Yiddish as soon as Herzl's vision came true. (Herzl himself proposed the German language as the language of the nation in Palestine.) The assimilated and semi-assimilated treated Yiddish as the gibberish of a semi-savage tribe. Even Y.L. Peretz, whose speeches Bunem heard at the Nightingale in the days when Saltshe took him there, claimed in one of his poems that Yiddish was a tasteless language, similar to a spongy bun. It suddenly occurred to Bunem that Yiddish was in a similar situation to Kayla: spit on, but craved. All the opponents of Yiddish claim that it is a cheap, mass language. But weren't similar things said a few hundred years ago about Italian, French, English, Russian, German? Didn't Polish spies spit on the Polish language and educate their children on the knees of the French language? Bunem reflected that he should get a few more cigar boxes and start collecting rare Yiddish words, special expressions, idioms. Kayla herself could be a spring of such a collection.

He was tired but couldn't fall asleep, and woke up in a panic every time he fell asleep. Should he move in with the old Sugarman and his daughter? Should he abandon Kayla to her fate? Someone like her could still kill. It was also possible that Yarma would shoot her, here, in the apartment. Bunem remembered that it had already been a year since he had met Kayla. In fact, a little over a year. Kayla came to his father on the eve of Sukkot. What would have happened if he - Bunem - hadn't been home at that time? In such a situation, he was now in Warsaw, painting or sketching in Kliatschko's studio. If he had stayed, he would have had to sit with his father in the sukkah, go to the Beit Midrash with him, participate in the Simchat Torah laps. So many things had happened in one year! A whole eternity had passed since then...

Bunem fell asleep at dawn. He woke up late, and saw that Kayla was not home. She had already gone to work at Dr. Weltcher's. Fresh bagels were on the table, and a pot of coffee was on the stove. He had never slept so soundly. He hadn't even had a chance to say goodbye to Kayla.

Someone knocked on the door. Could it be Yarma? Bunem saw the knife and hammer on the table, but for some reason he couldn't pick them up before going to the door. Maybe not to open it? But the knocking grew louder. He went to the door and asked who was there. A man's voice answered him, and Bunem didn't understand what he was saying. Well, come what may. I'm lost anyway. He opened the door, and in front of him stood some gentile. Not Yarma, but a letter carrier. The postman handed Bunem something that looked like a letter. In fact, it wasn't a letter, but a telegram. The telegram was sent to Markangelsk, and it said: "I'm getting better. I'll be coming to you soon. With much love, Stasha." Apparently Saltsha managed to escape from the place she had been exiled to. She must have obtained a fake passport. Bunem wanted to tip the telegram carrier, but he quickly left. He decided not to tell Kayla about the telegram. As for Saltshe, he didn't know whether to be happy or sorry that he was dragging her into his strange troubles and entanglements. Contrary to his nature, he didn't get carried away by the emotional turmoil that always happened to him, and managed to keep his cool. In the past year he had become accustomed to all sorts of strange events that befell him.

Bunem woke up hungry. He ate the pretzels with gusto, and poured himself coffee. How had she managed to escape? - he asked himself. She must have had the help of her anarchist friends. Underground anarchists, socialists, revolutionaries and just radicals are everywhere. Not a week goes by that an article doesn't appear in the Yiddish newspapers about fugitive exiles or political prisoners who managed to escape from Russian prisons and reach America. Many of them are Jews. They speak in various places, and a large audience comes to hear them. The newspapers always report that the hall was too small, and many were left outside. He, Bunem, also participated several times in such meetings, or in reading evenings. All the speakers brought news from Russia: the people are awakening and demanding freedom and equality. The simple peasant demands better food, improved living conditions, decent clothing. Some demand a proper education for themselves and their children. More and more young men and women "went to the people," trying to explain that the Tsar's decrees and the laws of the Duma - the Provisional Government he established - were nothing more than a means of deceiving the workers and peasants. Therefore, only a militant revolution could bring the light of a new morning to the masses. Sometimes German and even American socialists also appeared at these meetings. These speakers argued that the crumbs that Uncle Sam threw to the masses of workers should be ignored, because America was no different from Tsarist Russia or the other imperialist empires. Sooner or later, a fight would have to be fought here too for a better future for the workers. The speakers' words were always greeted with thunderous applause. The Yiddish-speaking preachers tried to prove that the capitalists were interested in keeping the Jews as a separate group, fed by false dreams of a return to

Zion and a religious faith that had been lost forever, while the revolution would put an end to the division among the members of the human race. Everyone will be united, without distinctions of race, nationality, religion, class, or economic status. After the revolution, these orators claimed, everyone will belong to one human association.

Bunem finished eating and went to the Zukermans. When would Hoshana Rabbah be - tomorrow or the day after tomorrow? Here, in America, Bunem had lost track of the time of the holidays and observances. Jews hardly went to prayer, except on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Almost all the immigrants worked on Shabbat and holidays, although on Shabbat and holiday eves candles were seen burning in the windows of houses. Most of the shops were open on Shabbat as well. Adult children hardly knew what Judaism was. On his way to the Sugarman house, Bunem had not yet decided whether to tell the old man and his daughter that he wanted to move in with them, at least until the end of the holiday, or to stay in his apartment and risk a violent encounter with Yarma. Old Sugarman and his widowed daughter, also elderly, lived alone in a large apartment. Apart from them, there were only the servants, and Bunem feared that the old men would not let him return to their house if he stayed with them even for a few days. He didn't want to break away from Kayla, and he couldn't. He also didn't know what he would do after Saltsche arrived. He pondered this and that, and couldn't decide. He had long since realized that one of the hardest things for him - and perhaps for all people - was to reach a decision and implement it. Indeed, during his life he had made countless decisions, and he had broken them all. Well, something was going to happen. Whatever happened, he told himself. Whatever reason does, time will do. The circumstances of time have their own laws and logic. Hegel's entire philosophy rests on this assumption.

the

Bunem could not leave Kayla and move into the Sugarman house. But he had promised Maurice Sugarman that he would accompany him on the eighth day of the Simchat Torah and eat the holiday meal at his table. The synagogue where Maurice Sugarman prayed had postponed the Hapach to the second day of the holiday. Bunem thought it over and came to some kind of compromise: he would sleep with Kayla at night, but during the day he would avoid being in the apartment as much as possible. If Yerma came to Kayla, it would probably not be in the middle of the night. During the day, Bunem was busy with Maurice Sugarman anyway, and after the holidays he would return to his job as a teacher. He could spend his free time at the public library on East Broadway, or at the city education department. Bunem called himself a coward, even though he knew that he did not have the strength to fight some knife-wielding, rough, and obtuse prostitute. Besides, since Kayla had run into Max, she had started drinking to the point of drunkenness. As soon as she woke up in the morning, she took a sip from the bottle. She became excessively talkative, repeatedly claiming that she would find advice and be able to stand up for herself against Yarma, and even against both of them - Yarma and Max together. She also demanded that Bunem not be at home and not try to support her. Kayla minced words endlessly. Over

and over again, she claimed that she was not afraid of anyone, and that she knew how to stand up for herself and defend her rights.

The synagogue where Maurice Sugarman prayed was in an affluent area where most of the residents were Gentiles. For the holiday, Maurice Sugarman wore a tailcoat, a top hat, and traveled to the synagogue in a carriage, along with his daughter and Bunem. As they entered the large and luxurious synagogue, Bunem was reminded of the modern synagogue at 101 Talomecka Street in Warsaw, which seemed small and sparse compared to the one in New York. Bunem was dressed in his holiday suit and a clean shirt, but he felt worn and shabby next to the other young men who came to the synagogue. In Warsaw, he was considered tall, and here he seemed short compared to most young men, and even young women. The women prayed with the men, reading from English prayer books, similar to those used by Gentiles in church. In their midst, Bunem was overcome by a strange feeling - as if wigs had grown on him like a magic wand and his suit had suddenly changed shape and become a cape. The people around him looked at him in amazement. Several women smiled at him. Bunem did not understand everything they said to him in English, even though he had read books in English and had managed to write himself many notes with English words. He was afraid that someone would start talking to him in that language. A fat man asked how he was, wished him a happy holiday, and held out his hand, on whose finger a diamond ring glittered. Maurice Sugarman introduced Bunem to that man - not in English, but in German. In fact, it was German Yiddish. The pot-bellied man was the president of the synagogue, he and no one else. His face smiled, and the wrinkles on his fat cheeks deepened when he heard that Bunem was the son of a rabbi in Poland, and that Maurice Sugarman was dictating his memoirs to him. Good-natured satisfaction lit up his brown eyes, and he exclaimed in admiration, in the same Germanic Yiddish in which Maurice Sugarman spoke: "How wonderful! Is your honor studying Talmud? Ah, it's so full of wisdom! It's a pity my parents didn't let me study it... My late father was a merchant, and he gave me a practical education, so that I would succeed in commerce. Ha-ha-ha..."

The prayer in English, men and women together, the organ playing, the mixed choir of men and women, the colorful sunshades on the windows, the huge bouquets of flowers placed by the ark - all of this reminded Bonam of a church. The distance between this hall and the Hasidic shteibel of Beit Abba was immense, like the distance between New York and Warsaw. The cantor wore a hexagonal cap and a robe similar to that of a Christian priest. He also conducted the choir. Well, but where does it say that God prefers the shteibel of the Hasidic of Sochaczew to this Reform hall? And what connection does Bonam have with God? After all, he has violated all the laws. He did not even keep the Ten Commandments. A person like him is not allowed to criticize others. He glanced at the English prayer book that someone had handed him, and tried to identify among the English words a content similar to that in Yiddish and Hebrew. From time to time he glanced at the young women singing in the choir. They looked like Gentile girls, with their blond hair and sallow faces. The melodies of the hymns they sang were imbued with self-confidence, pride, and arrogance. They did not exalt God with their singing, but rather demonstrated their beauty, the satiety of their healthy bodies, and their talent for arousing men. The air here was

saturated with the scent of perfume, and Bunem thought he also smelled incense. God did his part: He was silent. As always. Bunem remembered that his father had told him in the name of a Hatam Sofer that it was forbidden to enter a temple of this kind, and that if a Jew was forced to choose between such a temple and a house of prayer for Gentiles, it was better for him to enter a church. Well, but did a Hatam Sofer ascend to heaven and speak with God? Several young members of his family had assimilated, and some had even converted to Christianity. 102 One of Rabbi Akiva Eiger's great-grandsons was consul in Warsaw...

Bonham sat with Maurice Sugarman and his daughter in the carriage that was taking them to the old man's house. During the ride, Mr. Sugarman told him that for many years the Jews of German origin had been wary of the new immigrants who came from Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe. Now there is a tendency to accept their arrival and to approach them. Since 1905, hundreds of thousands of immigrants have come to America. They have flooded New York, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and other large cities. They began to build synagogues and create their own culture of life - a mixture of Yiddishism, socialism, Zionism and who knows what else. They have taken over the trade unions. Most of the Jews of German origin have become rich in America. But they are few. Many of them have assimilated among the Gentiles and have completely assimilated. Those who remain cannot completely ignore the Jews of Eastern Europe, and they are looking for ways to approach them.

Morris Sugarman and his daughter Bessie sat down late for the holiday meal. The gentile cook prepared fish, a certain type of - non-Jewish - pilaf, vegetables, and even cabbage soup like they cooked in Germany. It was not a holiday meal like Bunem had eaten at home. There, in the old house, his father would come from the shteibel slightly intoxicated. Every third Hasid invited him to Kiddush with wine, honey water, and nuts. The women baked all kinds of strudels, egg cakes, fruit-filled cakes, and cooked cabbage with raisins and apples in huge pots. In the men's houses, everyone danced - not only on the carpets, but also on the tables.

On Simchat Torah, women allowed themselves to mingle among the men. The Hasidim drank wine, got drunk, and occasionally allowed themselves to say things that on other days of the year would be considered blasphemous. Every year, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel tried to restrain the Hasidim, arguing that the joy of the holiday was Simchat Torah and not the revelry of drunkards who might break through a fence and sin, God forbid. But he too was forced to turn a blind eye when Jews got drunk on this holiday. All the righteous, especially those who followed the Kotzek Hasidim version, reminded at every opportunity that Hasidism was based on the joy of a mitzvah, while black bile was a form of idolatry.

Here everything was quiet. Maurice Sugarman sat at the head of the long table, and Bessie at the other

end. The father and daughter avoided any conversation at the table, because of the old man's hearing difficulties. The cook served everything quietly. The silence was so profound that they could only hear the sound of the pendulum of the antique wall clock, which had been brought here from Germany. Everything here was fine and rich: the food, the china on the exquisite tablecloth, the knives and forks of pure silver. The old man also had a set of gold utensils, parts of which were used for the holiday meal.

Morris took a crystal bottle full of cherry liqueur and poured himself a small glass. He also honored Bunem with the fine drink. Everything was here - except joy, faith in God, in Judaism, in the Messiah. There, in the shtevel of the Sukhatsov Hasidim, they were not ashamed of the elderly. Elderly Hasidim remembered Rabbi Mandela of Kotsk and repeated his Torah. There were even a few elders who still remembered Rabbi Bunem of Psishcha, the 103rd tzaddik after whom Bunem was named. Yeshiva students and young men considered themselves honored for having the privilege of exchanging words with these elderly Hasidim. Here, in America, they were ashamed of the elderly. The advertisements in the newspapers were addressed only to the younger generation. The elderly had already received their share in this world, and the next world did not belong to the business world.

Morris Sugarman continued his conversation with Bunem. His words were like the memoirs he had dictated. Everything referred to past events he had experienced: business trips and trips to Europe and America, meetings with millionaires, politicians, and all sorts of other celebrities. He spoke of political struggles in New York and Washington, mentioned train stations and railroads, and boasted about the first skyscrapers built. Everything was interesting, but not uplifting. Quite the opposite. Morris Sugarman's words led to the conclusion that time erases everything, and all the trouble and effort of humans is nothing but vanity.

Evening was falling. The old man began to yawn, and a look of weariness stretched over his dull eyes. Bunem said he wanted to go home. Bessie heard and called out firmly: "No! You won't go. You'll sleep here. I've got a room ready for you and a bed made up. Even pajamas. You won't go looking for the subway to the East Side now. After all, there's no one waiting for you there—no wife or children."

Max refers to what is said in Tractate Nedarim as: "Whatever a man wants to do to his wife, he does. A parable about meat coming from the butcher 's house : If you want to eat it with salt - eat it. Roast - eat it. Poached - eat it."

The original idiom: "It happens in Russia, on a table and on benches."

Originally: "He shall not smite with his tongue" (Gelet - silver). A witty continuation of "He shall not smite with his tongue" (Exodus 11:7).

The narrator uses the word "synagogue" to indicate that these are modern houses of worship. In New York - a Reform synagogue, and in Warsaw - a synagogue influenced by Western culture. The Great Synagogue of Warsaw (Tlomacka Synagoga) was an impressive building, which served as a house of worship for educated Jews ("Deutsch"). It was inaugurated in 1878 and destroyed by the Nazis in 1943 .

Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762 - 1839), one of the greatest rabbis in Hungary, was known for his struggle against the Jewish Enlightenment and Reform movements. He was the son-in-law of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, who is mentioned below.

Rabbi Bunem of Pshisha (1765 - 1827) was the second Rebbe in the Pshisha Hasidic lineage (he continued his rabbi, "the Jew of Pshisha"). Rabbi Bunem was a broad-minded man: a scholar and a man of action, a Hasid and scientifically educated (he studied pharmacy). Rabbi Mandela of Kotsk, mentioned in the previous sentence, was his student.

Chapter Ten

A

A few weeks passed, and Viarma was nowhere to be seen. Kayla concluded that he had traveled with Max to the other America - to Buenos Aires, or to other countries whose names she could not remember and could not pronounce. Shortly after Sukkot it became cold, but the house manager did not rush to turn on the heating.

One afternoon the door opened and Yarma entered. Bonham was not home at the time, teaching children at the Romanian community center. Kayla was busy in the kitchen, and had probably forgotten to lock the door with the safety chain. The knife and hammer were hidden in the dresser drawer. Kayla turned around and barely recognized Yarma. He was old, and looked neglected and dirty. His beard was unshaven, and his clothes were dirty. He was wearing a kind of American coat, and underneath it an open shirt, without a collar or tie, peeked out. He was not wearing a hat, and strands of gray hair stretched over his bare head. Kayla let out a scream and turned to open the drawer that held her

protective weapon. But she did not do so. Yarma did not look like someone who had come to hit or shoot. He smelled heavily of alcohol. He began to stammer in a strange, unfamiliar voice:

"I can't believe it, you don't know me?!"

"Yes, I know you. Like a bad curse. What do you want? What did you come here for?"

Yarma approached her.

"You are my wife, and I am your husband."

"You're nothing to me. You wanted to give me away to that gay, Max. You're still what you always were: a thief, a rude rag. Yerma, it's all over between us. I want to live my life, and you go live yours. What was between us is dead. Buried. Nothing."

"Kayla, you are my wife. Not that gullible Hasid from the Shteibel. We have a joint ketubah."

"We have nothing in common. You yourself said that a ketubah is nothing more than a piece of paper."

"True. But sometimes a piece of paper has an important role. I also gave you a wedding ring. My mother's ring."

"I threw it away a long time ago."

They were both silent for a while. Yerma looked at Kayla from the side, and his gaze was full of wonder. How could love be replaced by such hatred? Kayla was also embarrassed by the words she had said. What do I have against him? - she asked herself. Is it his fault that I fell in love with someone else? He looked emaciated, his skin yellow, sickly. Finally she said:

"Yarma, I have nothing against you. You are what you are, and that's how you will remain. But leave me alone. Bunem is a husband to me, a brother. Everything. Everything. Where is Max? Is he still in New York?"

"Max is now in Brazil."

"Why didn't you go with him? I told him it was over between us."

"Kayla, I can't live without you."

Yarma stirred, as if he were about to collapse. For a moment he was back to the Yarma he had been. He looked at her with a piercing gaze and a certain amount of condescending disdain for someone weak trying to rise up against him. He looked at his hands. Kayla squinted at the drawer where the knife and hammer were hidden. She pitied him, and at the same time she was ready to stab him with a knife or crack his skull with a hammer if he tried to take her by force. The smell of alcohol wafting from him made her dizzy and made her feel sick, like she had never felt before, even when she had to deal with drunks. Her mouth filled with bland mucus, and she felt the need to vomit. Yarma began to speak in a tone that was a mixture of the plea and the command of a man whose wife has stood up for him. "Kayla, what's wrong with you? I'm sick." Kayla was silent for a moment.

"What do you have?"

"Everything. Head, heart, legs. I can barely stand. Let me sit."

Kayla felt a twinge in her heart. "Here, take a seat." And she pushed a chair towards him.

"I walked all the way here," said Yarma, doubting to himself, doubting to Kayla. "A huge distance. Like from Muranov Street to Krokhmalna."

"Why don't you take what's it called?"

"I don't have a penny."

"Max didn't leave you anything?"

"He left me a lot. But I lost everything."

A bosom-wife's anger flared in Kayla's eyes.

"You lost, huh? What did you lose at, cards?"

"At cards, at horse racing. I also drank. Without you I can't hold myself together."

"My trouble, what can I do with you?" Kayla asked. "Why didn't you go with Max?"

"I wanted to be where you are. Give me a cup of tea. I'm hungry too."

"Yes. But I want you to know one thing: for you I am dead. Think of me as dead, lying four cubits deep in the ground."

"I can't think such a thing. A thousand times I decided not to go to you. But it draws me like a magnet."

"Wait. I'll give you something."

Kayla gave him a bagel. She buttered the other bun and served it to him with a slice of cheese. Then she

put a kettle of tea on the stove. As she worked, she cursed Yarma and herself: a bundle of trouble, a snoozer, a son of a bitch. I wish I had never been born; I wish I had died in my mother's womb. My bad luck, what am I going to do now? I need to get a rope and hang myself! Yarma chewed and said:

"I know everything. The woman, what's her name? His bride's mother told his sister Cirla everything, and she told Max after he threatened her with his gun. She even gave him your address. His bride is one of the anarchist comrades. They locked her up in the fortress. She almost got to the gallows. But they hired a good lawyer for her. I think they exiled her, or the devil knows what. If he has a bride, why did he crawl to you? A scholar and a shepherd of whores?! His father, a holy Jew, sat on him for seven days. For them, America is worse than a extermination camp. Know this, your follower won't keep you long. As soon as his bride is free, he'll show you the door out. Well, what do you have here? It's no better here than you had on Kruchmalena Street. Even worse. With me you wouldn't serve others. With me you'd own your own house. I'd kiss every step you take. You'd go shopping "To yourself. You wouldn't carry the lady's basket."

"I'm not carrying anyone's baskets. The tea is already boiling."

"You shouldn't have sold a bagel. I know everything. Every crumb. Max told me everything. Your follower will use you, and in the end he'll throw you away like a used rag. He'll also make a bastard out of you."

"Shut up! Shut up! If you don't, you'll be on the other side of the door soon!" Kayla shouted. "I love him, and he loves me. He's a scholar, a writer. He knows everything, and you're just a rag. A drunken slob, a ghoul. You can't mention his name with your dirty mouth."

"A slut, huh? A good mother's girl, huh? What's a brat like that worth to you? He'll never forget who and what you are. He'll be ashamed of you like you're ashamed of leprosy. Max told me that this wise guy isn't taking you anywhere with him."

"How does Max know that?"

"He told him that himself. You spoke like that too."

"I didn't say anything to him. May Max's dirty tongue swell up and explode! The moment I saw him that night at Kaminsky's theater, I thought to myself: This is my angel of death. He came to me on Yom Kippur and pounced on me like a murderer. You knew everything! You sent him to do this to me!"

"I didn't send him."

"You did send it, you filthy pig! You leper pervert! You yourself admitted it. May you both burn like a blazing fire. Since this happened to me, I am no longer the same old Kayla. I saw how deep I was sinking in the mud. I ran to a holy place and tore worlds apart in front of the Ark of the Covenant. My feet led me to the dear Jew, the teacher-teacher, and Bunem was there. It was all from heaven. Ever since I met Bunem, I understood what love is."

"You love him, but he's bugging you."

"He loves me too. He talks to me as an equal. He teaches me English. We lie in bed together and he talks to me about the wonders of the Creator: the sun, the moon, the stars, everything that existed in ancient times..."

"You need it like a dog needs a fifth leg."

"Here, here's your tea. Drink and go away."

"Kayla, don't throw me out!"

on

Yarma asked Kayla to give him some Yish. At first she refused, bargained with him, and finally put a bottle in front of him. Not a minute passed, and she herself tasted a little. Yarma promised Kayla that he would only have one glass, but he poured himself three. The drinking got him talking, and he told Kayla what was happening in the square at number six Melina Street. He told her about Blind Icha, Shmuel Shemant,

Eliezer the bartender, and mentioned his trip with Max to the provinces. At first Kayla refused to listen, claiming that she did not want to know anything about the dogs from Krochmalena Street and their disgusting adventures. But Yarma's words made her feel homesick. Here she knew no one, except for a few neighbors and old Dr. Weltscher, who hardly spoke to her and rarely said a word to her. There they talked about her, remembered her, envied her for having advanced in life and gotten a decent boyfriend, the son of a teacher. Yarma told her that she was causing a huge stir on Krokhmalna Street. All the women of the prodigals were proud of her and praised her for having managed to break away from the shameful misery of her life.

It wasn't long before Yarma began to tell about his and Max's journey across Poland. His speech was confused, but the more he continued to tell and describe, the more Kayla's curiosity grew. Both he and Max had been to Lublin, Zamość, Krasnostow, Izwica. They also reached Piasek, the town where many famous thieves lived. In one of the towns, Max met one of his ex-wives and gave her a divorce, after she had been considered for many years to be forever lost. There he also met his children, those he had left when they were still young and who were now seeing their father for the first time. Yarma added: "Kayla, you could write a whole book about what I went through. I've known a lot of smart guys in my life, guys who can get by in any situation. But no one can fix the whole world like Max. He's also really crazy. He cooked up the kind of porridge that could get him hanged not once, but a hundred times. But Max knows how to get himself out of any trouble. If he wants to, he can talk like a lawyer with a diploma. He has polished words like in the newspapers, or the devil knows. His Russian is Russian, and his German is German. The idiots he fixed attacked him with such shouts that I thought they wanted to gouge out his eyes. One threatened him with a butcher's knife. But before he was a whore, everyone kissed him and he promised them mountains and hills. A real pithom and Ramses. He can overcome everyone, even convince stones. If that's not true, my name isn't Yarma. First he says he's completely broke. Empty, without Sweets. Suddenly, all at once, he has a full wallet. Either he's a sorcerer, or the devil knows what. Maybe he has some kind of machine that prints banknotes? Twice they tried to put him in the dock, but he confused the detectives and drove them so crazy that they began to appease him and gave him respect, as if he were a general. He has maybe ten fake passports, and he remembers the names on all of them. Here's a Jew's name, there's a Gentile's name - a Pole, or a Russian. On the train he showed me a passbook for free travel, without a ticket. I could have made a living with him, be in seventh heaven. But I couldn't get you out of my head. I would have had to drink Yish. If I didn't, I would have gone crazy. This man, Max, is everything: he sleeps with men, and with women too. He loves children, and also girls. In Izbica, by a strange stroke of luck, we met an aunt of his, ninety years old, or maybe a hundred. An aunt with a face covered in warts and skin wrinkled like a shriveled cabbage leaf. She was deaf as a wall. Half crazy, a witch or something. Here she blessed him, and there she began to pour curses as terrible as death upon him, leaping at him and bursting into loud howls. She hissed and hissed like a snake. She panted like a cat or a dog threatening to bite him. She spat at me, and her saliva burned like fire. It was Friday. The old woman stood by the hot oven, dirty and blackened like a chimney sweep, and took out hot loaves of bread from it with a rake or a pestle. Why would such an old woman need so much bread? She didn't even have a single tooth in her mouth! She wanted to let me taste it, but I was afraid she

would poison me. You wouldn't believe it, but the oven was full of hot coals, and she stuck her hands in it with all her fingers. Like that. As they are. "How could this be? Just like Grandma Yachne at the theater. She wanted us to stay with her until after Shabbat. But outside, a sleigh was waiting for us. Max gave her a few coins, and she ran after us and threw a bundle of twigs at us for firewood."

“Maybe she really is crazy?” Kayla asked.

"I don't know. I don't know anything. Sometimes I thought Max was some kind of sorcerer in disguise. He would send telegrams wherever he went - to Warsaw, abroad. This and that. He goes into the post office, and everyone listens to him. He hardly needs to eat. We go into the hostel, and he orders a serious lunch, maybe ten courses, but he only eats a crumb from each course. Whatever they give him, he doesn't like. There was a girl there, a tempting piece of merchandise, and she asks: 'What do you want? To be given plates from heaven?' And he answers her: 'If you would let me eat your beylik, I would take it. Not everyone has such a beautiful chest.' She burst out laughing, and I thought she would burst out laughing in a moment. She laughs and says: 'The one who stands with me under the canopy will get my beylik.' Now listen to a story: Max and I stayed overnight in this hostel. At night he tells me: 'Don't sleep with me. There's a separate room here for you.' I immediately realized he had someone. Late at night I hear quiet footsteps. I open the door and see: it's the bird with the beylik. Barefoot, in a nightgown. She winks at me, and puts a finger to her lips: Shh! Shh..."

“What do they find in him?” Kayla wondered.

"Ah, they must be finding something. He begged me to go to Brazil with him. But I told him: No. Without Kayla I'm nothing. A man without a head. Completely finished." 104

"Yarma, I belong to the Bunem. I want to live the righteous way."

"The right way, huh? I once spoke to a dear Jew. A wise man, a scholar. And he told me that as long as I don't give you a divorce, you are committing a grave offense every moment you live with this scoundrel. There is no forgiveness for such offenses, you never get out of hell. Those were his words. Besides, a pure and kosher woman must go to the mikveh. Otherwise she is impure."

"I will go to the mikveh when my son tells me to go there."

"If he doesn't tell you, it means he's no better than me. Max wanted to make you a complete, all-powerful lady. You would be dipped in gold. If you're impure anyway, why wouldn't you enjoy it? With us you would live comfortably. Here you're dressed like a beggar. Let's drink to life."

"No, Yarma. Get out of here."

"I'll go, and never come back. Max gave me his address. You'll remain - what's it called? - a man's wife. Without a divorce you belong to me, and the sin is on you."

"If you don't give me a divorce, the sin falls on you."

"I'm not afraid of sins. There is no God at all. Now there is some kind of machine that flies in the air, above the clouds. And there is no God there. It's all empty air."

"Yarma, go."

"Kayla, this isn't going to go so smoothly for you."

Yarma made a motion as if to get up, and at that moment the door opened and Bunem entered. Kayla did not hear his footsteps on the stairs. The evening came. Bunem carried under his arm a bag that Kayla had bought for him, and in his hand he held two books that he had borrowed from the public library on East Broadway. He stood in the doorway, looking in wonder at Kayla and her guest. Bunem knew it was Yarma, he remembered him from the old house. On the table were some bagels and a bottle of Yish. Kayla must have bought the Yish secretly, without his knowledge, and kept it in a hidden place. A mocking smile came over Yarma's face:

"So this is him, the great hero?"

"Yarma, get out of here."

"And if I don't go, what will you do? Sprinkle salt on my tail?" asked Yarma. "You are my wife. Wherever you live is my home. He will go to hell. He took my wife for himself. I didn't take his."

Bunem wanted to say that this was his house, because he paid rent. But the words never came to his lips. Anger attacked him, and also fear. She is holding a feast here in his honor - Bunem thought. She is buying him a home. A bitter nausea rose in him, towards himself and his situation, and he heard himself say:

"If this is your house, you can stay in it with her. I'm going."

"Boonem, don't go! What's wrong with you?" Kayla cried out. She ran to the dresser and grabbed the knife she had prepared for just such an occasion. "Yarma, go!" she shouted. "Otherwise there will be blood."

"Well, stab me!" Viarma bared his chest.

"I'm going!" Bunem shouted.

While running down the stairs, Bunem heard Kayla's screams. Yerma also screamed. Bunem froze in fear. Sparks flew before his eyes, embers of fire. He stood for a moment, seeing nothing. He ran on shaky legs, and the ground shook beneath him. What was this? An earthquake, or what? - a thought flashed through his mind. The street was full of passersby. Many people stood in the doorways of houses or sat on the steps. Bunem saw no human faces, only spots. Well, this is the end! The end! - he said to himself. His mouth was dry, and his throat choked. Soon they would drag me to the police. They would arrest me and interrogate me... A moment later his legs gave way. He had come a long way. After a while he realized he was on one of the avenues in Halftown, near 14th Street, and then he turned toward Morris Sugarman's house on 19th Street.

third

Bunem reached Union Square, but immediately turned back. He remembered the scream he had heard as he came down the stairs, and he could not leave Kayla alone with this villain. But what would he do? If this thug had not murdered her today, he might do it on another occasion. Bunem had read that in America anyone was allowed to carry a weapon. One could go into a store and buy a rifle or a pistol. But could he, Bunem, carry a weapon? To be equal to a type in whose eyes everything was a waste—even his own life? I must get out of this trap, Bunem told himself. He now wished for Saltshe's arrival, although he was aware that her arrival would make the whole mess much worse. I will kill myself and put an end to this whole mess! - he concluded.

A heavy rain began to fall, and a cold wind blew. He approached the area where Jews lived. The air was filled with the smells of baked dumplings and stuffed intestines. The smells of roast meat drifted from the open doors of the Jewish restaurants - mixed with the pungent aroma of horseradish, mustard, vegetable stews and fruit compote. Jews settled in and established themselves here. The rain continued to fall, but the newsagents continued to advertise their wares: newspapers in Yiddish and English. The newsstands were lit by Lux lamps. Here and there, the sounds of singing could be heard from a restaurant. Not a gramophone, but the voices of singers and singers who performed there, and the restaurant guests who joined them while eating and drinking. These were songs in Yiddish, Russian and even Hungarian. Here and there, a prostitute tried to attract customers with a wink of seduction. Everything here was like in Warsaw, and yet - different. There, in the old house, Bonam recognized people by their appearance and clothing. Each street had its own character. He often had the feeling that the windows of the apartments and the walls of the houses testified to their residents and told about their occupations, their lifestyles, and even their opinions and thoughts.

Here everything seemed foreign and superficial to him. As if everyone lived a temporary life, and the city had disguised itself as a huge train station. Everyone was running around restlessly. If they stopped, it was only for a brief moment. He had to travel from here to somewhere else. But where? - To Japan? To China? To another planet? It's all in my head, a random hallucination, he told himself. He remembered a saying from the Gemara: This world is like a wedding feast. We dance, and go home. But where is home? - In the grave??

Bunem continued walking, barely restraining the feeling of despair that had taken over him. Maybe run back to Warsaw? Maybe collect some money and travel to the Land of Israel, like those members of the Bilu movement - Beit Yaakov, let's go and let's go? Or maybe the Jewish soul, by its very nature, needs a feeling of exile among gentiles? He was unable to decide anything. He had to wait until Saltesha arrived here. He knew very well that Saltesha mocked the Zionists, and saw them as reactionary delusions. Homesickness suddenly attacked him. How were Dad, Mom, Tsirla, Shalmelah, Chaimka? He had a hard time believing that everything there had remained as it had been: Dad was studying Gemara with additions and commentaries, poring over questions and answers in "Shagat Aryeh", in the writings of

Rabbi Akiva Eiger, a sopher; Mom was reading in "Shevat Musar", "Lev Tov", "Hovat HaLevvot"; The 105 children go to the "room," and Tsirla reads the serialized novel that appears in newspapers over a long period of time.

After some time, Bunem arrived at his apartment on Eternie Street. He looked up at the window of his apartment, but saw no light. Had Yerma murdered her? Bunem stood paralyzed, gripped by fear. He was afraid to go up the stairs to the third floor. Suddenly he remembered that he didn't have a key. He had left it at home when he fled. Maybe Yerma had slept with her, and now they were both sleeping? Maybe she had stabbed him and then killed herself? Bunem hesitated for a long time, and finally started up the dim stairs. He knocked on the door, and no one answered. He increased his knocking and called out: "Kayla! Kayla!" She's lying there dead - he decided. They'll still accuse him of murder! Bunem knocked on the door of the apartment opposite. But no one answered. An old couple without children lived in this apartment. The neighbors must have gone to the theater on Second Avenue. Bunem returned to the door of his apartment, and knocked and knocked again. But no one answered. Maybe call the police? He must do it immediately! Now it was too late. Too late! His limbs twitched with fear, and he hurried down the stairs and out into the street. The rain had stopped, and only a cold wind blew. Should he go to Maurice Sugarman's house now? It was time to commit suicide, cried a bitter voice in his soul. Put an end now to the slavery of the soul and the depression of life. He only felt pity for his father, his mother, his sister Zirla, and also for Kayla - if she was still alive. Well, what would happen to Saltesha when she got here and found that he was dead? He passed through a small garden with a few trees, and went out into the market street. Now there were only empty stalls here. On the other side of the street stood empty carts. These carts were used by the wholesale merchants to transport goods to the shops and to the market stalls. Now they stood still and empty. Bunem had heard that homeless people used to sleep in them. Maybe climb onto one of these carts and spend the night in it? But the police follow the homeless and chase them away from the carts. The market was empty. All the goods had been collected from it, and the smell of fruits, vegetables, onions, and garlic still lingered. There was also a strong smell of horse manure. Lamps were burning inside the apartments, and through the lighted windows the silhouettes of men and women could be seen. Bunem didn’t know exactly where he was going—to Laughton or to Downtown. He walked through half-dark alleys and reached the eastern bank of the river. Ships, tugboats, barges with freight cars were docked near it. A low sky spread out over the river, and here and there a star peeked through the clouds. Columns of smoke rose from the chimneys of the houses. Everything that happened here was familiar to Bunem, and yet foreign. It was the same land, the same sky, the same stars, the same water. But the little stranger, the tiny spark that bears the name Bunem Tomashuber, wanders here lost, afraid, hungry, homeless.

He returned to Etorni Street, and again saw that there was no light in the window of his house and the door was locked. Could it be that she had gone with him? Or had he dragged her by force? It was too late for him to go to the Sugarmen, and it was too cold to sleep on the street. A couple approached, and Bunem recognized the elderly neighbors. He turned to them apologetically and told them what had

happened to him. At first they did not understand his language. They were already old-timers in the place, and he still spoke like a green immigrant, with a Polish accent. Not a moment passed, and the woman realized what had happened. The manager of the house was not there. He had probably passed out drunk in some tavern. After an exchange of words, the woman suggested:

"Maybe our key will fit your door too. Come on, it's worth a try."

"Our key won't fit a foreign door," the old man said in an angry tone.

"It's worth a try. It doesn't cost anything," his wife replied.

First the couple opened the door of their apartment. Then the man began to fiddle with the door of their house. The stairwell was half-dark, and the old man complained that the new immigrants were only causing trouble. He tried and tried, and finally grumbled and said: "Keys are made to fit only one door." Still he groaned and pushed, and the door creaked open. The woman was pleased:

"Well, do you see?"

"What do I see? I broke the lock, or it was broken to begin with. Well, so be it. Good night."

Bunem wanted to ask them for matches, but the neighbor hurried away and slammed the door of his house shut. Bunem stood in the dark room, terrified of what might be revealed to his eyes as they adjusted to the darkness. For a moment he thought he saw someone lying on the floor, and he could barely control himself from running away. It wasn't long before the darkness of the night began to lift. No one was lying on the floor. It was just a patch of light that had broken through the streetlights and penetrated inside. Bunem went into the kitchen and began to grope around the stove in search of the matches that Kayla used to put near them. But he groped and groped, and couldn't find them. She went away with Yarma, muttering to himself. His astonishment was greater than the sorrow and regret he felt. I don't even know people, if such a thing is possible. All her talk about love and everything else was just one big lie.

After a long search, he found matches and lit the gas lamp. Now he saw a bottle of Yish on the table. Just like that, she got drunk and left with that guy. Where did she get Yish? - he asked himself. She must have been drinking without his knowledge. Well, a whore remains a whore, he told himself. It's better that way. It was ordained by heaven that I would come to America. Thank God I didn't travel at the expense of her impure money. He wondered at himself. How was it that he suddenly became religious? Actually, it always happened to him in times of need.

All he had to do was undress and lie down to sleep. He was no longer used to sleeping alone. What a pleasure it was every night, to lie in bed and watch her prepare herself to come to him: bathing, washing her head. She bought herself a black nightgown with lace embroidery. Her body was always hot, and he was filled with lust even before he touched her. Every time she had different stories: deeds that had happened in the past, and also things that had happened in recent days. She told about the patients who had come to Dr. Weltscher, about the apprentices who had worked at the doughnut baker. All the men desired her and promised her mountains of gold. Young men whistled after her in admiration. Even Gentiles. Now he got into an empty bed. I'll move in with the Sugarmans, he decided. I can't live here alone. But he had to stay until Saltesha arrived at the address he had written down for her.

Bunem tried to fall asleep, and as soon as he began to doze, he woke up with a shudder. How could a person be such a liar? - he asked himself. Maybe sometimes a lie is the truth, if its power is so great?... He was astonished by the very idea. Maybe this is where the power of idolatry lies? Bunem remembered what is said in the Psalms: "I said in my haste, 'Every man is a liar.'" Yes, yes. Already in those ancient days there was someone who came to this conclusion. Well, but this only applies to humans. Animals do not know what a lie is. Nature is the absolute truth.

third

What a strange night! Bunem turned over in his bed and his body was on fire. He fell asleep and immediately woke up. He hadn't eaten dinner, and thirst burned his throat. He drank water from the tap and went to urinate in the bathroom at the end of the hall. He didn't want to admit, nor could he admit, that he missed that promiscuous woman - the prostitute who had deceived him and made fun of him. If that's the case, then I myself am nothing but a lie, he told himself. Over and over again he replayed in his mind everything that had happened to him in the past year, and he couldn't believe that this was really what had happened to him. It all looked and sounded like a fairy tale, or like one of the parables of the Maggid of Dubna. 106 He left God and fell immediately into the netherworld, into the nineteen gates of impurity. It seemed that only one step separated God from Satan. Well, but can he return to God? And to which God? - The God of the Bible? Of the Shulchan Aruch? Of Spinoza?

Early in the morning the thought occurred to him that Kayla was innocent. Maybe Yerma had threatened her and forced her to go with him? Bunem remembered the butcher knife Kayla had hidden in the drawer, in case Yerma tried to attack and rape her. He got out of bed, turned on the gas lamp, and opened the drawer. The hammer was there. The knife wasn't there. I have to call the police! Now! Drag her somewhere! Bunem began to look for bloodstains or other traces of a struggle. No. There was no sign. Besides, she had offered Yerma a drink. Next to the bottle of Yish stood two glasses. Kayla had bought them for household needs. Bunem feared that the police would come after him and accuse him of who knew what. Gentiles are Gentiles, even in America. Another verse flashed through his mind: "The place of justice is where the criminal is." 107 The police, the judges, the lawyers - they all side with the guilty. The legal system is structured in a way that grants rights to criminals and denies the victim a chance for rehabilitation. Well, but what would he say to the neighbors? What would he say to Dr. Walther or the donut baker if they asked about Kayla?

Bunem secretly hoped that Kayla would return, even though he had decided to send her away once and for all. But the days passed and everything remained as it was. Cold days began, and one night it snowed. The snow continued to fall the next morning, covering the roofs and the emergency stairs. Etorni Street was filled with gray snowdrifts. Bunem realized that the snow in New York was different from the snow in Warsaw. Here it was heavy and dry like salt. Since Kayla had left, Bunem had not been at home. He found a cheap cafe, ate breakfast there, and read an English newspaper, in addition to a Yiddish one. He was amazed that the newspapers announced the arrival of snow on the main gate. Is snow news in New York? The newspapers were full of articles about engagement parties, sermons by priests, and sometimes even rabbis, and trips by rich people to Europe. They printed portraits of criminals here and wrote about them as great heroes. Obituaries told in detail about the occupations of the deceased and the amounts of money they earned. Entire pages were devoted to athletes, especially horse racing jockeys. There were also photographs from motion pictures - a new type of theater that presented a story using moving images. Yiddish newspapers were filled with news and articles about the revolution and strikes, and alongside them - polemical articles on various topics. In contrast, in English newspapers, a calm and quiet prevailed. Advertisements advertised special food for pets - dogs, cats, parrots. Other ads urged women to remove hair from their legs and faces. Sometimes the newspapers told of ghosts that had entered old houses, of mediums who had caused tables to rise into the air, trumpets to blow of their own accord, and of the dead appearing to the living and describing how their lives were going in the other world. Around Bunem's home, missionary groups were handing out pamphlets praising Jesus, the Messiah, the King. Salvation Army volunteers sang religious hymns. Bunem often felt that America was not just a different country, but a different planet.

Many areas in New York were divided by population groups: a black neighborhood, a Jewish neighborhood, a German neighborhood, an Italian neighborhood. In Warsaw, they had hardly heard of

Ireland, and here there were Irish people everywhere: Irish policemen, firemen, landlords in City Hall. In that America, Indians, Mexicans, Chinese, Eskimos also lived. Each neighborhood had an administration that granted favors to those who suited it. Gangsters and mafia members had institutionalized organizations. Representatives of various associations - atheists, animal lovers, anarchists, religious sects - spoke in the streets and handed out leaflets and flyers. Suffragists held rallies, demanding equal rights for women. Ah, I will never understand what is happening in this country. They think differently here than I am used to, Bunem said to himself.

Weeks passed, and Bunem had not heard from Kayla. She had disappeared forever. He had not heard from Saltshe either. Had she been arrested again? Had she fallen in love with someone else? One day, when Bunem went to see Maurice Sugarman, Bessie informed him that her father was ill. The old man had suddenly developed a high fever, and was now lying in bed. The doctor had forbidden him to dictate his memoirs or to receive visitors. The patient needed complete rest, she said. Bessie looked worried. She told Bunem not to come until a few days later, or to call.

Bunem had heard many times how oppressive loneliness was and how it negatively affected one's mood. But he had never known how painful it was. Now he saw himself as one of the dead wandering in the vast expanses of a chaotic world. His life was aimless, without hope. He wandered among strangers he did not know and did not want to make contact with. He was only twenty-one years old, and despite his young age, he began to live like an old man whose gaze was directed only to the past. But his connection with the old home was severed. The mail from Europe did not arrive because of the stormy sea, and Bunem did not receive letters from Tsirla. He also did not go to work: the children stopped coming to Judaism classes because of the frost and heavy snow. The Yiddish newspapers reported that many workshops had closed. In others, the workers declared a strike, cutting their wages and extending the working day.

Poor people searched for food in garbage cans. Infectious diseases spread, and many funerals came out of the East Broadway morgue. Wealthy ladies organized charity balls and donated the proceeds to the needy. But this was not enough to reduce the shortage. The wealthy of New York - the Schiff and Warberger families - tried to help poor Jews from Eastern Europe. But the number of gentlemen was small compared to the huge number of unemployed people who had nothing, so the help they received was almost not felt. Baron Hirsch tried to settle Jews in cold regions of Canada. But a writer visited these remote villages and reported that the entire area was full of swamps, and the waterlogged mud soil was unworkable. Therefore, the Jewish farmers fled from there to Winnipeg, and if they had money for the journey, they tried to reach Toronto, Montreal, Quebec. No good news came from the Baron's colonies in Argentina, and the shortage also affected the farmers in Palestine. There was even a lack of water.

D

Kayla didn't return, but Bunem didn't report it to the police even though he decided to do so. He also didn't go and inquire after Maurice Sugarman. He knew very well what happened to an old man with pneumonia.

A dull fear took hold of Bonam. Added to it was an indifference or laziness that he himself did not understand. He was almost mentally paralyzed. He was not prepared for the conditions of life in the cold New York winter. There was no heating in his apartment. One of the neighbors mentioned that the building was scheduled for evacuation and demolition. The owner of the house, an old widow, deaf and mute, was hiding somewhere, and it was impossible to find her. The neighbors could do nothing but curse and swear. Some had moved in in the middle of winter. As soon as the tenants left, street boys came and broke the windows of the abandoned apartments.

At night, Bunem covered himself with a coat. He also threw on a few of Kayla's jackets that were left in the apartment, and wrapped his legs in her warm shirt. Despite everything, he was shivering with cold and worried that he too would get pneumonia. In the meantime, he only coughed, and his nose was stuffy. His head ached, but he didn't have a fever. Although he felt unwell, he went to teach the boys at the community center of Romanian immigrants. Some students stopped coming, but some continued to show up because they had to prepare for the bar mitzvah ceremony, and Bunem rehearsed with them the recitation of the Haftarah blessings. It's hard to say that they learned. The children yawned and played cards under the table. Who cares about a Temple that was built about three thousand years ago, and has been in ruins for two thousand years? What's interesting about the prophecies of disaster for Egypt, Babylon, and Syria, or the prophecies of rebuke for the Israelites? Not one of the students intended to put on tefillin or observe the other Torah commandments. Their minds were on baseball and football games. Some of these mischievous ones would sneak into the vaudeville shows at the theater, or to baseball and football games.

Thank God, the public library was heated, and Bunem could sit there for long hours. He read mainly popular science books. Books on physics, zoology, biology, astronomy, history. He also liked travel diaries. Among other things, he leafed through the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer. The library housed many philosophy books that someone had donated: translations of Leibniz, Descartes, and writings of Hume, Locke, and Hobbes in the original language.

Now Bunem could also read Malthus's writings in the original language. This thinker spoke the bitter

truth about the world and life in it. Everything is built on wars, epidemics, famine, mass murder. Genghis Khan, Khmelnytsky, Napoleon, Bismarck - all helped God preserve the human race within a certain biological balance. Murderers and tyrants have an important purpose on earth, like lions and tigers. Darwin proved this in detail in his many studies. "Thou shalt not murder" was said by a Jew, not by the God who created hungry wolves and sheep that were devoured by them. All the interpretations that served as foundations for moral doctrine remained interpretations, because such a basis does not and cannot exist.

If so, why is he - Bonam - wandering like this in the wild jungle that operates on the principle of kidnapping and eating, murder and being murdered? What does he have to hope for? What is the point of his longing and expectations? Kayla has returned to her pimp, Saltshe will probably come to America to fight here for justice, freedom, equality and other ideals that will never be realized. She will probably want to bear him children, and they will only make his life heavier and prolong his suffering. He also sees no point in giving birth to new generations of wolves or sheep. What will happen? Everyone will quarrel and fight each other: the thieves and robbers, and all the fools who believe in empty advice and false teachings.

Well, but who is God, or nature, who established this rule? What are the forces that maintain this order? What are the rays of light that emanate from radium for hundreds of thousands of years? Where is the movement of the stars and galaxies directed? What is its consciousness, of Bonem, and where is it located? How does it operate and function?

That winter day, the weather was mild. In the morning, there was still wet snow, but it melted immediately. Later, the clouds dispersed, and a clear, bright sun appeared in the sky. Bunem had already forgotten that she existed. Everything spun before his eyes, and his legs went limp from sitting and reading. Towards evening, he went for a walk. He wandered aimlessly, and along the way he read the signs that hung above the shop windows. Most of the signs were written in English, and a few were in broken Yiddish. On his way, Bunem turned onto a side street, and there he saw Kayla standing next to a basket full of pretzels and a woman choosing a bagel for herself from the basket. Bunem was so lost in thought that at first he didn't realize what was happening here. But he quickly came to his senses and realized what his eyes were seeing, and who. Was it a hallucination? His heart pounded and his breath hitched. He stood there wondering. Until now, he had been sure that Kayla had become a prostitute again. Now he saw her in front of him with a basket of bagels. She looked different, in clothes he didn't recognize. But he recognized her. Is that her, or am I daydreaming? - he asked himself. The woman rummaging through the bagels must have been exaggerating, because Kayla got angry and snatched the bagel out of her hand. Bunem laughed, and tears washed over his face. God in heaven, he hadn't cried in years! He wasn't a natural crybaby. But now his face was hot and wet. He hurriedly took out a handkerchief, and wiped his eyes and cheeks. Now he stumbled over to the basket and asked in a choked

voice: "How much does a bagel cost?" Kayla looked up, and a loud cry came out of her mouth: "Bunem!" She waved her hands, and her face contorted in a strange way. People stopped and looked at them curiously. Bunem was shocked and ashamed. He felt his eyes becoming covered with a thick fog, or a smoke screen, and heard himself mumbling:

"Don't make a fuss. Come on, let's go somewhere."

"Mom! My mom! My mom!"

They met on one of the streets of Downtown New York, but Krochmalna Street echoed with Kayla's voice. The smell of the bagel also drifted from there. The day had passed, but night had not yet fallen. A chilling twilight hung over everything. Fast delivery wagons and other wagons drove across the snow mixed with mud. From time to time, an automobile also passed by. The stench of gasoline mingled with the smell of horse droppings. The streetlights turned on by themselves. The shops continued to sell yarn, wool, scraps of fabric, shoes, spare parts. A yellowish sky hovered above the flat roofs, laden with rainwater and leftover snow. A machine hummed somewhere. A jukebox, the kind made in America, made a faint pleasant sound. A man dragged a dog tied to a leash, and the dog insisted on lingering and smelling a lump of mud or another dog's feces. Kayla started running with the basket of pretzels, and Bunem barely caught up with her. At the end of the street, someone was standing and roasting chestnuts over coals that were emitting thin smoke. A butcher was sawing bones in a butcher's shop. They hadn't seen anything like that in Warsaw. They chopped the bones there with an axe. In the barbershop, a man was lying on an armchair, and the barber covered him with a sheet and shaved his beard. A boy in a white apron was sweeping up the strands of hair that had scattered on the floor. Kayla arrived at the tavern and said: "Come on, let's go in here!"

She opened the door and Bunem followed her in. Inside, they were playing the piano, and drunks were singing loudly. Waiters in white aprons were running around, carrying huge beer mugs. Fat guys were sitting with their fat girlfriends at long tables. They spoke German, drank beer, devoured thick sausages smeared with mustard, sang German songs. Huge dogs stood by the tables, waiting for scraps of food to be thrown to them. On the walls hung stuffed deer heads, portraits of emperors, pictures of mountain landscapes, hayfields, and hunters in the forest. A waiter approached Kayla and told her in broken English that peddlers were not allowed in the tavern. But Kayla pointed at Bunem and answered him in Yiddish: "We came to drink, not sell." The waiter hesitated for a moment, then led them to a corner where there was a small table covered with a red tablecloth, and on it was an ashtray. Inside the ashtray was a half-smoked cigar.

"What happened? Where did you go?" asked Bunem, the words stuck in his throat. Kayla was silent for a long time. In the darkness of the place, Bunem could not see her face. A night of shouting and singing rose from the hall where they were sitting, and perhaps from other rooms as well; a jumble of booming male voices and shrill chirps of women. Apparently a feast or some other celebration of Germans was being held here. Bunem heard Kayla say:

"Bun, I am unclean."

"What do you mean, huh?"

"He attacked me and raped me. You shouldn't have gone and left me with him."

Bunem bowed his head.

"You drank with him, YHWH."

"He got me drunk, then pounced on me like an animal. I'm - what did you call it? - unclean."

"You went with him, huh?"

"I couldn't stay with you any longer. I swore to you that no one would touch me again."

"You live with him, huh?"

"He is now lying in hospital. They stabbed him."

"Who stabbed him?"

"Another pimp. Here they are called 'pimps'."

"Have you returned to your previous lifestyle?"

"That's how he wanted it."

"Why did you go with him, huh?"

"Bunem, all is lost. My mother used to say: 'You can't make a shtreimel out of a pig's tail.'"

"You lived with him, huh?"

"No. Yes."

"With others too?"

"not."

"Well - - -"

"Boom, I'm not human."

"What are you?"

"I'm a whore. A promiscuous woman. All the evil in the world. I'm also pregnant."

Boonem was silent for a long time.

"How do you know?"

"I didn't get the monthly celebration."

Bunem's throat was so dry that he could barely get a word out.

"From whom, huh?"

"Either from him or from you. I don't know. My period was delayed before it even happened."

the

Kayla sipped the whiskey the waiter brought her. She drained the glass in one gulp. After a moment she drank the drink that Bunem ordered for himself, and said:

"Bunem, I'm not allowed to drink. I become like a wild animal when I drink. I forget everything. I had a bottle at home, and from time to time I drank from it without you knowing. But when he came and started talking about Warsaw - about this and that, about Blind Icha, Shmuel Shmenat, the square, the tavern - I became bitter in my soul and took out the bottle."

"Have you had other men too?"

"No. Just him. I drank so much that I couldn't stand on my feet. He was just waiting for this. I grabbed the

knife, but he snatched it away from me. He threw me on the bed and did whatever he wanted to me. When I realized I was unclean, I went with him. He dragged me like an animal to the slaughter."

"He wanted you to have others too?"

"He tried. But I couldn't do that. So he went to another prostitute, who belonged to that pimp, and he stuck a knife in him."

"You're right. You really aren't human."

"Boom, I'm going to die."

Their whole body was tense.

"Are you sick?"

"No. But I don't want to live anymore. I don't want to give birth to this baby. Someone like me shouldn't be a mother. I thought about you a lot. Not a moment goes by that I don't think about you. But I said to myself: Kayla, leave him alone. Is Saltsha here yet?"

"No, no."

"Is she writing to you?"

"I haven't heard anything from her."

"She will come again. I once wanted to be her maid, to carry her baskets in the market. But here it is a

different country. Everything is foreign. I go out into the street, and it is not the same street. I enter a tavern, and it is not a tavern. I do not know English and cannot learn this language. They do not speak. They only close and open their mouths, like fish. Whiskey is not Yish. It does not enter the heart. I walk around here as if in a bad dream. The food has no taste either. I do not want to be buried here. A funeral here is not a funeral. If I had money, I would go back to Warsaw and buy myself a piece of land there. To have my own grave, even outside the fence. It is better to be buried there outside the fence than here, in the front row. There is no God here."

"If he's sleeping, he must be everywhere."

"No. The sky is different here. Here Jews are not Jews. Even Gentiles are not Gentiles. Everything is like that, foreign and strange. Like it says in a book of fairy tales. Sometimes I wake up suddenly at night, and I can't breathe. Yerma gets drunk. He's always drunk. He wakes up in the morning and says: 'Kyla, I'm going to rinse my mouth.' And what does he do? - Pours himself a glass full of whiskey, and drinks it all. He stopped talking. Just babbling like a monkey. Every word comes out the other way."

Kayla fell silent, and after a moment she added:

"I would have put an end to my troubles a long time ago, but I don't want my bones to rot here. I'm saving money for the trip back, and for that I walk the streets selling bagels. For me, every day is like a year long. I go to the hospital for him, and he's lying there wrapped in bandages. Only one of his eyes is peeking out from under the bandages. He's lying in a large hall, full of beds. Everyone there is moaning and screaming. One screams so much that you can't hear what the other patients are saying. They're being taken for surgery. One patient had some kind of tube stuck in his nose, so we don't know. It's worse than the hospital for the poor in Warsaw. I was there once, when I went to visit a prostitute whose whole body was falling apart. Pieces literally fell out of her. The nurse gave her a bun, and when she put it in her mouth, two of her teeth got stuck in the bun and stayed in it. Buneml, I can't believe I'm sitting here with you. How did you find me?"

"I was just walking down the street, and suddenly I saw you."

"It must be from God. Every moment I wanted to go to you, but I didn't know the way. I forgot the name of the street you live on. I lay awake for whole nights, trying to remember. My head almost exploded. I asked Yarma, but he wouldn't tell me. That's the truth."

"Attorney Street."

"Mom! My mom! Write this down for me. If I show people the name written on the paper, they can show me the way. I would like to come and say goodbye to you before I run out, or before I go back. In Warsaw I never forgot the name of a street or how to get to it. Ah, here I am, I forgot again. What did you say, what is the name of the street?"

"Attorney Street."

"I can't say that name again. It goes in one ear and out the other. Write it down for me on a note."

"I don't have paper and pencil here."

"When we leave here, I'll buy a pencil and a small notebook. You write everything down there. Where do we go here if we want to buy a ticket back to Warsaw?"

"There are businesses like that. A place that sells ship tickets is called a travel agency."

"Huh? Where is it? You have to know how to read here. If you don't know how to read, you don't know how to go and how to get back. All the streets here are the same. There's no difference. I learned to walk to the bagel baker and to the place where I live. I made signs for myself: here's a place where they give the horses water, and there's a gate with fire trucks parked next to it. In the middle of the gate there's a kind of iron slide, and when a fire breaks out everyone slides down from the top floor. Oh, everything is so different here! Since I left you, my head has been completely confused. I even forgot your last name. I only remembered that your name is Bunem."

"Tomashover."

"Mother, how could I forget that? I even had an uncle in Tomaszow. Uncle Getzl. Here I forgot everything. Yerma reminded me of all the names when he came to me. I became completely speechless here. As if I had been blinded. I am lying in bed, and it seems to me that I am on a ship. The room is spinning like a carousel, and it seems to me that I am spinning along with it. Maybe this is some kind of illness? Maybe I am crazy? Yes, I am crazy!"

"No, Kayla."

"What am I?"

"Frightened and confused."

"Huh? I don't manage with their money either. I give an excess, and the buyer says it's too little. Sometimes, when I happen to have a rich buyer, he gives me back a penny or two. I'd like to ask people how to get to you, but how can you know in such a big city where someone named Bonem lives? Oh, I have to laugh. It's something like a joke about Herschel Austropoler. No. Josef Lukasz. 108 He was walking down the street, and suddenly he forgot his name. Someone told me this joke when I was still a little girl. There, in Warsaw, I was a grown-up person who knew how to get by. Here I'm like a baby. I think it happened to me out of fear and longing. A drunk as a rat, but I remember everything. How could such a thing be?"

"Anything is possible."

"You read books, and you know everything. But I don't know anything. In Warsaw I knew every crumb. Here everything seems to have sunk into the sea. As long as I lived with you, I managed somehow to get by. But since Yarme dragged me away, everything has been melting in my head. I wouldn't even have found my way to the hospital if I hadn't had a neighbor whose husband has been lying there for two months. He is paralyzed all over, and soon they will transfer him to some place where those lie who nothing will help anymore - neither doctors nor prescriptions. This woman takes me to the hospital, and I also go back with her. They lie there in a large hall, full of patients, each shouting and wailing in his own language. One shouts in English, one in Italian, and others in Russian, Polish, and who knows what else. There was also a Chinese lying there. Here the Chinese don't have braids like the Chinese in Warsaw. But they are yellow too. And when they are sick, they become twice as yellow. Their eyes are slanted, and they look Like two cracks. This Chinese man's wife came to him and they spoke their language. A strange

language. Everything is nasal. Sniffing and snorting. Only God knows how they manage to understand each other. Miracles! Bunemal, you once promised me that you would say Kaddish after I went wherever I was going."

"I don't want to live anymore either."

"Huh? Why? Saltsha will come to you soon, and you can start a new life together."

"No, Kayla."

"How is that? Why is it like that?"

"Ah, there's no point in that."

"What will you do?"

"I will die with you."

and

They fell silent. For a while they sat and listened to the noise that came from the Germans' long table. Kayla couldn't help herself:

"Buneml, why do you talk like that? You're young. You're just starting to live."

"Kayla, I'm tired of everything."

"What will you do?"

"I will put an end to this."

"Buneml, I want you to kill me first."

"Yes. Maybe."

"Oh, the bagels!" Kayla exclaimed. "If I keep sitting here they'll get cold, and no one will buy them! Call the waiter. It's dark outside."

Kayla stood up and called the waiter. She asked to pay for the drinks, but Bunem hurried and took a few coins out of his pocket. The waiter grimaced and laughed openly at these two greens with their Yiddish. He didn’t even thank them for the tip they had given him. Kayla took the basket, and Bunem followed her out. Outside, thick, wet snowflakes were falling that melted as soon as they landed on the sidewalk. Cold gusts of wind drove away the warm vapors that were emitted from the shops. The wind, blowing along the alleys, carried with it the smell of the sea and fish. Bunem tried to read the sign that had the street name written on it, but his eyes were watering and he could only make out vague shadows. He asked Kayla where she lived. She was given a name that rang in his ears like a jumble of two English words, and added in agreement:

"Atonement. I'll stay with all the bagels. What do you want me to do?"

"Come to me."

"Huh? I have to go to the hospital with him tomorrow. If I don't come, he'll eat himself alive. I'm afraid he'll be left with only one eye."

"What is the name of the hospital?"

"Huh? I used to know, but it slipped my mind. The old neighbor is taking me there. It's a Jewish hospital. Wait, I have a note somewhere. The policeman who came to inform me wrote everything down. He wants me to be a witness in the trial. There was also someone at the hospital who gave me some kind of card. Everything is written in English. Here, if you can't read, your situation is worse than death."

"I'll read everything for you. But not here. Not on the street."

"Do you know how to lead me back home? I have a note from the housekeeper. We'll both have to eat all the bagels."

As soon as Kayla said these words, a woman came up to her and bought some pretzels from her. After a few minutes, more shoppers came up. Kayla put the basket on the sidewalk. Bunem stood to the side, some distance from her. Well, I'm going to die anyway. So what does it matter? - he apologized to himself for the comical situation he had found himself in. He was not used to drinking strong drinks, and the little he tasted made his head spin, as if he were really drunk. Bunem was supposed to show Kayla how to get to his house, but he himself didn't know the way to Eterni Street. So he stopped someone holding a Yiddish newspaper and asked him where to go. The man asked:

"Green, huh? You're off the ship now? Go right and then left to Grand Street. From there - - -"

"That's where I already know. Thank you."

"Where are you from, Poland?"

"Yes, from Poland."

"The clumsy Russian is giving you trouble, huh?"

"Yes. As always."

"There are no anti-Semites here. Here everyone is equal. Here, if the president says something inappropriate, they throw him to hell and elect another president. Here, a Jew can walk with his head held high."

"Yes. Could be."

"Is this your wife?"

"yes."

"Where did you find such a beautiful woman? From the old house?"

"yes."

"She even makes money. Huh? I'll buy her some bagels."

The snow was getting thick and dry. They kept walking, and people were buying pretzels from Kayla. Bunem suspected that the men were lusting after her and looking at her with lust. She had not lost her beauty, despite all the troubles and torments she had been through. Her red hair, green eyes, and fresh, shining skin in his heart created a blend of colors like in a wonderful picture. Kayla spoke loudly to overcome the whistling sounds of the stormy wind:

"What do you say to that? They steal my goods. My basket gets light. On cold days, people get hungry. Sometimes people come to me who can't pay. They've lost their jobs, so we don't know about trouble. Here they're called 'slacks.' 109 When one of these people comes to me, I take a bagel and give it to him for free. My life is already stuck. I'm in trouble I can't get out of. He - my disaster - chased me to America, and there's no end to it. I wanted to be good to Yarma. Maybe that way he would agree to give me a divorce. But he remained the rude thug he always was. He snatched the knife from me, and I thought

that was the end of me. I wish he'd stuck the knife in me. That way I'd be better off. He'll never agree to give me a divorce. He keeps saying he loves me. What kind of love is that? He wanted to push me back out onto the street, to the drunks and the other animals. A son of a bitch. That's what he is. A pig. I wish that pimp was Finish him off, and I would remain free. Be quiet, I don't want to come to you. I'm unclean."

"If he raped you, you are not unclean. Besides, by law you are his wife."

"What? You know everything. I know nothing. I don't want to have his baby. If it happened like this, it's better that this baby never came into the world."

They reached Aterney Street, and Kayla said, “It wasn’t that far. If it were decided upstairs that I would live a few more years, I would like to learn to read. But it’s too late. Too late.” They went up the stairs, and Kayla said, “The basket is empty. There are only three bagels left.”

Bunem opened the door, and a blast of frost burst toward them from within the apartment. Kayla paused for a moment, standing thoughtfully.

"Oh, it's as cold as a refrigerator. Oh, Bonamel, and I thought I'd never see this room again."

"Close the door. The neighbors don't need to hear everything."

"It's worse here than the apartment in Krokhmalna number eight."

"Yes. It's cold here."

"Wait, I'll turn on the gas."

From the beginning, Bunem had intended not to touch her again. But now he was seized by intense

desire. He began to pull her towards the bed, but she resisted:

"Leave me alone. I am unclean."

"No. I love you."

The figurative idiom in the original: "Aois kepelios ma'acher" (literal translation: No one makes hats).

The list of books is adapted to the gender - cultural norm of the Jewish street. The father reads halachic literature: "Shaagat Aryeh" is the important halachic book by Rabbi Aryeh Leib Ginzburg (1695-1785) - written in the format of questions and answers. The mother reads popular moral books that have been translated into Yiddish: "Shevet Musar" was written by Rabbi Eliyahu HaCohen HaItmari of Izmir in the seventeenth - tenth century, the book "Lev Tov" was written by Rabbi Yitzhak ben Elikom of Poznań and appeared in Prague in the same century. "Hovat [Dues] of the Hearts" by Rabbi Bachay ben Yosef Ibn Pekuda (1080) is a foundational book in Jewish moral theory.

The preacher Rabbi Yaakov Kranz (1740 - 1804). Like other preachers, his sermons discussed matters of faith and morality. But he knew how to spice them up with fascinating parables, which captivated the hearts of his listeners. That is why he was widely known as "the leader of preachers and the father of the rulers of parables in Israel."

Ecclesiastes 3:16. A pessimistic verse that appears in a blatantly rebellious context.

Hershel Ostropole and Joseph Lukash are historical figures who have entered the treasury of Jewish folklore. Hershel, the better known of the two, lived in the town of Ostropole in the second half of the eighteenth century and was the jester at the court of Rabbi Baruch of Mezibuz, the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov. In subsequent generations, Hershel entered the popular humor of Eastern European Jews as a representative of the image of a wise clown and as the hero of countless folk jokes that were attached to him. Joseph Lukash was the rabbi of a small town - Dreznia in the Podolia region (now within the borders of Ukraine). This rabbi was given the image of a fool and a shlumiel, and he stars in several folk jokes.

Originally: slack (neglected, careless). The author puts this word in Kayla's mouth to express a hidden protest against the alienating capitalist attitude towards the unemployed.

Chapter Eleven

A

After Purim, a telegram arrived from Saltshe. She was in Hamburg, about to board a ship sailing for America. Bunem went to the port to meet her, and there he met Saltshe's elderly uncle, Sam Buchbinder - the younger brother of her grandfather. This uncle had gone to America more than forty years ago. Saltshe's grandfather was no longer alive. His father, Rabbi Yehezkel, Saltshe's great-grandfather, married an eighteen-year-old girl in his old age and had this son with her: Shmuel-Febel. The boy did not want to study, and while still in Warsaw he became a carpenter. When he arrived in New York, Shmuel-Febel went into the furniture business and called himself Sam. Sam set up a business and sold furniture on installments. He also traded in antique furniture, and specialized in renovating antique tables, chairs, wardrobes, chests of drawers, beds, and even pianos. While still in Warsaw, he married a girl who was active in the Polish socialist party "Proletariat". The Russian authorities persecuted the members of this party and executed many of them. Therefore, Mrs. Tamara was forced to flee Poland. In those days, there were almost no girls who showed interest in socialist movements. It was especially rare to meet such a Jewish girl, and especially - the daughter of a wealthy Hasidic family. Her real name was Reitze-Temerl, but she decided that she was more suitable to be called Tamara. Tamara came with Sam to New York, where she gave birth to three daughters. After some time, she died of a complication of influenza, or perhaps pneumonia. Her daughters grew up, and now they are all married and mothers of children.

Sam Buchbinder told all this to Bunem while they both waited for the ship. Saltesha's father, Jacob, was still a small boy when Sam left for America. He was called Jankle then. The elderly uncle Sam had not corresponded with the family in Poland, so he had only heard of Saltesha a few weeks ago. As it turned out, Sam lived near the house of Maurice Sugarman, who had since passed away. He had known his daughter Bessie. In recent years, Sam had handed over his furniture business to his son-in-law, the eldest of his three sons-in-law. The other two sons-in-law had gone in different directions: one was an engineer, the other a dentist. He himself, Sam Buchbinder, had not remarried after his wife's death. But, as Bunem discovered, he had been living with his maid for more than twenty years - a Gentile named Patricia, the daughter of a poor farmer from New Jersey. However, Sam continued to read a Jewish newspaper, and from time to time he attended Jewish gatherings and masquerade balls organized by Jewish labor unions for various purposes. He also became close to anarchist circles in New York, attending the balls they used to hold on Yom Kippur.

Sam Buchbinder was a short man, and looked young for someone approaching seventy. Although he had retired from business, he continued to refurbish antique furniture in the homes of wealthy people. Sam told Bunem that he had worked in the homes of America's most important millionaires, and was even invited to work at the White House in Washington. He did not work for the money he earned, but because of his love for this craft. In his eyes, it was an art that required a lot of patience and knowledge of all kinds of wood and paints. Sam Buchbinder kept a portfolio full of letters from American dignitaries and their wives. He told Bunem that he was an avowed atheist, and that he supported the views of radical revolutionaries. However, he claimed that he did not believe that it was possible to rescue the poor from poverty and realize the ideals of freedom and equality.

"I know the little people. I know them. All the trouble is caused by narrow-mindedness. People don't support each other. People are ready to peck out each other's eyes, if only they would let them," he claimed. "Yes, just like it says there, in the chapter. I forgot what exactly, and where."

"They devoured each other alive." 110

"Huh? You remember what it says in the holy books. We have forgotten everything in America. We have neither time nor patience. I come to their meetings, and donate a few dollars. There is one gentile among them who has learned Yiddish. He knows Yiddish better than the Jews. They publish a pamphlet, and every week I receive it. Their leader, Kropotkin, lives in London. A wise man. A big head. But he behaves as if there is no landlord in the world. I come to the greatest people to repair their furniture. I eat with them, and when necessary, I also stay to sleep. They talk to me as an equal. This and that, they say. Jesus discovered the truth, and you, the Jews, are a stubborn and tortuous people. I answer them openly: no one has found the truth - not Moses, not Jesus, not - what is his name? - Karl Marx. What kind of girl is Saltsha?"

"She's one of your people."

"my?"

"She wants to make the world a better place."

Sam chuckled. "She'll stay willingly. All the greens who come here say nice words. In America, the dollar

is God. Here, man changes. Not three months go by, and everyone starts running after the dollar. The greens do it with greater enthusiasm than the old-timers. They forget all the nice talk very quickly. As soon as they accumulate a few dollars, they change their place of residence. They leave Downtown, and move to Uptown, among the Goyim and the Yakim, the Jews of German descent. Their children grow up and become complete Goyim. That's how the wheel turns. What do you do for a living?" Bunem told him. "Is this what you want to support a woman with? Here, a teacher's situation is worse than it was in the old house. Even manual labor doesn't pay much. You work in a factory for twenty years, and then they send you away and let you put your teeth aside and stop eating. To suffer the shame of hunger. Here, if you want to achieve something, you have to turn to business. Even a small business. Small things can grow. You can get rich from business, but working as a hired hand for an employer leaves you a beggar. How did all the rich manage to get rich? Each of them started as a small peddler: he took a bundle and called himself a traveling salesman. Such a peddler earns twice as much as an employed worker. Here, not far from here, there is a street called the Pig Market. Those looking for work come there. A tailor carries a sewing machine, a carpenter walks with a saw, a shoemaker with a shoemaker's broom. Agents from workshops come there, recruit the greens to work, and earn a few dollars, brokerage fees. The workers work in the factories The sweat rises from dawn until sunset. Workers who live far away stay to sleep in the workshop or rent a bed from women who let subtenants into their small apartments. If the factory goes on strike, these workers have no money for a loaf of bread. Now trade unions have been founded to try to improve working conditions. But it won't help, and it won't change anything. The workers will always remain poor. That's why I advise you to turn to business."

"What business?"

"Become a peddler. There are already more peddlers than buyers, but sooner or later everyone manages to make ends meet. In Staten Island you can do business in the transportation industry. If not, move to New Jersey or I don't know where. You can't be ashamed here. The first thing a person should do when they arrive in America is to throw shame to the ground. Ah, here, the passengers are starting to get off the ship!..."

on

Bunem planned to bring Saltsche to his apartment on Eternie Street. But Sam Buchbinder argued that a bride was not allowed to live in the same apartment with the groom. He hired a carriage and took Saltsche and Bunem to his house. Saltsche looked like someone who had escaped from Siberia: wrapped in a thick, rough coat with a sheepskin collar. She wore a hat of similar fur, and clumsy boots. Saltsche had aged, and looked shorter and thinner than Bunem remembered her. She carried a heavy suitcase

with her. It later turned out that if the immigration agents had opened this suitcase, they would have sent her immediately back to Russia. The suitcase was full of anarchist writings: books by Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Stirner, and beside them - all sorts of pamphlets in Russian, Polish, and German. In addition to the suitcase, Saltshe had several bundles with dresses, bedding, and all sorts of little things that her mother had bought for her and included in her luggage.

The journey from the port to Sam Buchbinder's residence on 24th Street at the corner of Madison Avenue was long, and Saltshe did not stop talking. She preached anarchism, criticized America, and told what she had been through in exile. She was exiled to a remote village in northern Russia. The villagers were poor peasants who could not read or write. They were all full of lice. Inside the thatched roofs of the miserable huts were thousands of bedbugs, which attacked the hut's inhabitants in droves. Cockroaches and crickets buzzed on the floor and behind the wood stoves, and no one even tried to crush them. Every attempt at rebellion or assassination of the heads of the government triggered a wave of mass arrests. Tens of thousands of innocent people were arrested. The prisons were full and overflowing. There were not enough police to escort the convoys of prisoners exiled to Siberia, and in their place they put grandmothers equipped with batons. Saltsche spoke angrily about the Marxists and the people of the right and left who were trying to introduce a new form of slavery in Russia. She mentioned names that Bunem had never heard. She cursed and reviled America because a few years ago some anarchists had been executed in Chicago, and she described these anarchists as tortured martyrs who had given their lives on the altar of freedom. Sam Buchbinder tried to stop her flow of speech by remarking that if Bunem and Saltsche were engaged, they had better get married as soon as possible. But Saltsche rebelled:

"David, what do you think of a wedding? Letting some rabbi, a wretched parasite, say a blessing? I don't believe in such things. I don't need any ceremonies or blessings from religious people."

"What do you want? Free love?"

"Yes, free love. But my concept of love means that love exists where a man and a woman live together openly, and show full responsibility towards each other and towards the children they will have."

"Here, if you don't get married, you don't get a birth certificate for the baby."

"We don't need any documents. We spit on such papers."

Sam Buchbinder lived in a large apartment, and all the rooms in his house were crammed with furniture, books, antiques, old newspapers and magazines, and just plain unnecessary things. The apartment was so full and crowded that you could barely move around in it. Patricia, Sam Buchbinder's housekeeper, was as short as he was and as thin as a stick. She addressed Saltshe in English, but Saltshe didn't understand a word she said. Bunem could barely understand what she was saying either, because she swallowed the words. Patricia complained that Sam Buchbinder had filled the house with such clutter that it was impossible to clean and tidy the rooms. The carpets were stacked on top of each other, and when she tried to dust off one piece of furniture or another, Sam scolded her for breaking the rare piece of furniture. Everything had to remain as he had put it. There were no bedbugs here like in the remote village in Siberia, but there were no shortage of cockroaches and crickets. The poison and other sprays that Patricia had liberally sprayed were of no use. Strange as it may sound, the kitchen, which was under Patricia's complete control, was also full and overflowing with pots, pans, china, silverware, and all sorts of appliances that Bonem had never seen before. A huge samovar also stood here unused, next to a huge refrigerator and a pantry full of food: cans, jars, bottles, and bags of all kinds of food. This kitchen smelled strongly of cheeses and pickles and smoked meat, and to this was added the scent of hot pepper, cinnamon, ginger, and other spices. The apartment was heated, as on a hot summer day. The central heating was on nonstop. Saltsche argued: "Excess consumption is a product of capitalism. A free society will produce exactly as needed, and therefore workers will have free time, which they can use to enrich their cultural treasury."

Patricia served food to the guests. Not home-cooked food, but prepared food from cans and jars. After a short rest, the young couple went for a short walk down Madison Avenue. Bonham had never been to this part of Uptown, which was far from where he lived. The elegant street reminded him of Marszalkowska Street in Warsaw, except that the wealth was more evident here. The street was full of carriages and automobiles, their horns honking and cheering nonstop. The shops were full of shoppers. Every third house had a bank branch. Passersby crowded the sidewalk. Most of them were wearing spring clothes, despite the winter weather. Several women were already wearing hats decorated with artificial flowers or decorations of cherries and grapes. Everyone looked at Saltasha with curiosity mixed with a slight mockery. Saltsha exclaimed: "All this is the product of exploitation and oppression. The tycoons - Rockefeller, Morgan, Carnegie and their ilk - are all thieves and swindlers. The masses of the people should come to a wise decision and exterminate them like rats."

Bunem rebelled: "Maybe you should stop talking about politics for a moment?"

"Justice is not politics."

Slowly, Saltesha began to inquire about how he was doing here, in New York. Suddenly she stopped. "Ah, I forgot the main point. Who was it you were traveling with? My mother talked about it so much that my ears rang. My professor from the folk high school met you at the train station with some shady girl who later lost her money, or who knows what. It never occurred to me that you were having an affair with someone else." Bunem didn't answer right away, and then he suggested: "Let's go somewhere we can sit." And Saltesha replied: "Where? I don't see any pastry shops here. Wait, I think I spotted some kind of garden. Over there, this way."

They both turned back and came to an unfenced garden. The trees were still in the shade, but the sun was shining and the benches were dry. On one of the benches sat an old woman scattering seeds for the pigeons. An old man was leading a dog on a leash. The dog tried to stop, but its owner got angry and pulled it by force. A young man in a stiff hat and a light summer coat was walking with a girl in a suit with a fur collar and a hat decorated with a feather. In her hand the girl held a purse with silver tassels. Bunem and Saltshe sat down on a bench, and she said: "You don't have to tell, if you don't want to." She spoke Yiddish mixed with Polish, and from time to time she threw in a word in Russian. Bunem answered her:

"I decided a long time ago to tell you everything. The whole truth."

"Who is she?"

"Former prostitute."

Saltesha glanced back, as if she suspected someone was eavesdropping on their conversation. “Do you deal with women like that?!” Bunem answered her with a detailed story. He told how Kayla had come to his father on the eve of Sukkot and asked for a way to repent; how he, Bunem, had shown her the way to the tailor’s house; how the tailor had thrown her out, and he, Bunem, had led her to the atelier. He mentioned Yarma and Max. Saltesha sat still. The sun warmed the air, Saltesha had taken off her fur hat, and the light winter wind ruffled her hair. She listened, and from time to time glanced at him from the side, as if she couldn’t believe that it was really Bunem who was talking to her. This was not just a story, but a confession. After a while Saltesha looked away from him, bowed her head, and looked at her thick boots. Finally she said:

"So many things have happened to both of us, that it seems to me that this is all just a dream."

"Saltsha, this is real."

"Yes, yes. She could have infected you with a terrible disease. They say Nietzsche died from this disease."

"yes."

"Aren't you sick?"

"I hope not."

"Haven't you been checked by a doctor?"

"A doctor checked us both in Hamburg. I had no symptoms."

"What are the signs of the disease? Well, it doesn't matter. Are you in love with her, or what?"

"What is love? This concept is not clear to me at all."

"Huh? It was clear to you once. You told me you loved me."

"Yes. But now I don't know exactly what love is."

"If you don't know, how can I know? Well, as it seems, it's all over between us. What are you going to do? Stay teaching all your life, and teach children who don't want to learn?"

"I don't have any plans. Wait, you don't know everything yet."

And Bunem began to tell Saltsha about Yarma's arrival in New York, and about Kayla's pregnancy. Saltsha cringed all over.

"Bonem, I would never have believed that a person could reach the lowest point so quickly."

"You just have to start."

"You're kidding, huh? I heard your sister is planning to come here. What will she say after she hears this story? My mom even mentioned that your parents want to come."

"By the time they arrive, it will be over."

"What do you mean? I have nothing left, except to work for the cause of our movement. But first I must find myself a job. On the way here, on the ship, I thought of all sorts of plans. But I didn't consider such an ending. Have you stopped painting? Don't you want to go back to painting?"

"I don't want anything anymore."

"I guess this is our last meeting."

third

The religious Jews on Etternei Street baked matzos from a baker who observed the mitzvot. Those who were less careful about kosher bought industrial matzos. On the other hand, there were a few devout Jews who tried to obtain preserved matzo. One rabbi published an ad in a Jewish newspaper that he was

selling a type of matzo - matzos baked from flour that was free of any fear of chametz, thanks to careful supervision during the harvest and grinding of the grains. The wine for Passover was sold in all the wine shops, even those of non-Jews. On Passover Eve, Etternei Street was filled with the scents of horseradish and harosat - aromas that only a Jewish nose can distinguish. The president of the Association of Romanians, which employed Bunem as a teacher, invited him to the Seder night. But Bunem evaded it and made the excuse that he had already been invited by someone else. He did not go to pray, and there was no sign of Passover in his apartment, even though it was impossible to get bread on Etternei Street or in the nearby streets. He, who received a strict Jewish education and knew all the laws, abandoned the "Shulchan Aruch" and even the Ten Commandments. He still believed in God, but his faith concerned an abstract and invisible deity, who had never been revealed to anyone and no one had any idea who she was, what she was like, or what her will was. According to Bunem's view, this God was a kind of universal scientist or technocrat, without any moral appeals. This God is indifferent to the injustices that occur on earth, to the suffering of man and the suffering of animals. Indeed, man is molded in the image of God, and therefore no one cares what happens to his neighbor, and everyone ignores the worries and suffering of those around him. Most of the monuments that humans have erected are to the glory of murderous rulers. Even great writers and poets - such as Goethe, Pushkin, Adam Mickiewicz - praised and glorified Napoleon, the mass murderer. The philosopher Hegel saw Napoleon as the embodiment of the spirit of the new age, and valued him as if he were a demigod. Revolutionaries and leaders of robber bands were also praised. And what about animals? - For them, man has not even a drop of mercy.

In the other apartments of his residence, they held the Seder night. Jews sat with their wives and children and read the Haggadah, sang Passover songs, ate matzah and maror, drank four cups, calculated the total number of plagues that had befallen Pharaoh in Egypt, and enumerated the good things that God had done for his people Israel from that time to the present day. But that night, Bunem read a book about the life of insects. From time to time, he would dwell on a word he did not know, check its meaning in the dictionary, and write it down on his vocabulary card. Zoology, biology, and all the other logy refuted the claims and sermons of the Haggadah.

Suddenly he heard footsteps. Kayla came to visit him, wearing a maternity dress that concealed her protruding belly. Since the day Yarma attacked her and dragged her to him, she had stopped working for Dr. Weltcher. The distance from Yarma's place to the doctor's house was too great for her, and she didn't know exactly how to get to East Broadway. After a while, after meeting Bunem, she came back here, but she hardly stayed the night because Yarma had caused a commotion when she went out all night. Kayla's belly had started to swell lately, and she was as ashamed of this pregnancy as if it were leprosy. She was carrying a fetus in her womb whose father she herself didn't know. The shame and disgrace were great, even for someone like her. She would sneak over to Bunem's house only after nightfall and leave when the people she knew were already asleep and the street was empty. She ran past the few houses to Grand Street, and from there she turned into the alley between Rivington To Stanton Street, to the house where Yerma lived. This house, like the house where Bunem lived, was slated for demolition.

This time Kayla arrived loaded down with bundles. Earlier, she had gone down to the basement of the house where she lived and prepared Passover dishes for Bunem: matzot, gefilte fish, and kneidlach. She even brought a bottle of wine. Unlike Bunem, Kayla could not break away from Judaism. She repeated many times that she remained a Jewish woman, not a gentile, despite the low point to which she had fallen. Now she entered, said Happy Holidays, and set the table with the Passover dishes she had brought. Kayla also brought a Passover Haggadah, and asked Bunem to read it for her. But Bunem shook his head in the negative. Apart from lying in bed together, the two of them had nothing to say to each other. They also did not want to prolong the conversation. Kayla handed Bunem the fish, and he ate it. Then she gave him the kneidlach, which had cooled down. In the meantime, she told him that she had gotten a new job. She was now a maid for an old bachelor, a Gentile, who lived on Christie Street and worked as a hospital morgue attendant. He helped Kayla register with a maternity hospital, where she could give birth when the time came and rest after the birth. He also suggested that she call an organization that helped mothers in her situation, and helped them give up their babies for adoption. But Kayla replied that she intended to raise the baby she would have herself.

Bunem undressed immediately after dinner and went to bed. Kayla washed and shampooed her hair, as she always did before going to bed. But Bunem turned away from her and turned to the wall. He fell asleep without saying a word. Kayla lay awake for a while, and finally she fell asleep too. In the middle of the night she woke up, and woke Bunem too. Bunem opened his eyes.

"What happened?"

"Boom, I don't want to live anymore."

"Me too. But you're carrying a baby in your womb."

"I don't want this baby. You promised me once that if you put an end to it, you would do it with me."

"Yes, if you want."

"Boom, I'm ready!"

"Well, good."

"when?"

"I don't want to do this here. My sister Tsirla knows my address here. I don't want her to know what I did."

"So where? And when?"

Bunem didn't answer. Strangely, the thought of death aroused his instincts. He hugged Kayla, and she clung to him. Her body was passionate. They kissed for a long time, kissing and silent. Their dormant lust was revived. Between kisses Kayla said:

"Buneml, you once promised that if we decided to do this, we would both go and spend three days together first. This would be our farewell from the world."

"Is that what I said?"

"Those are your words."

"Where are we going? I'm penniless."

"I have a few dollars. You once said we'd both go to the sea and end it all there."

"Well, we'll see. I want to get away without anyone knowing where I went."

"No one knew," Kayla said. "We are lost in our lives, and certainly after death."

"What will happen to Yarma?"

"I don't care about him."

They lay close together, listening to each other's despair. Bunem remembered a verse from the book of Proverbs. King Solomon, or whoever wrote this book, described the condition of someone who gives in to forbidden lust: he enjoys its pleasures, knows that it is forbidden to him, but does not know that it is a netherworld that invites the dead to it. 111 He began to think about what might happen: Zirle would come to America and not find him. His mother would not know where his bones had gone. And because of whom was he going to lose his life? - Because of a prostitute anyone could have gotten for ten pennies?! Maybe it is not too late to run away from her and start all over again? - Bunem asked himself, and at the same time he leaned his ear and listened. Maybe an inner voice would answer his questions? But no answer came. The will to live had abandoned him, faded, faded like a candle. Bunem suddenly remembered Saltasha. What a strange end to their relationship! She came to him, fled from Siberia to reach him, and here they parted suddenly. Did she live in the old uncle's house? Or perhaps joined local anarchist circles? Does she truly believe that human nature can be changed with the help of some kind of program outlined on the basis of the theoretical platform of this or that thinker?

Bunem was tired. His mind was empty of thoughts. He wasn't sleeping, but he wasn't awake either. Suddenly he shook himself off, and a new thought came to his mind. Why does Kayla want to die? - he asked himself. Why can't she abort the baby or give it to some institution? Why isn't she willing to go back to Yerma, or find herself another type like him? Did she really love him, Bunem, that much? Had he hypnotized her? At that moment Kayla opened her eyes and asked - as if she had read his thoughts:

"Maybe all is not lost yet? Maybe we can escape somewhere?"

"Where to run? We've already run away once."

"We can run away so that Yarma can never find us. Max is probably in prison. Yarma is half blind. He won't have the energy to look for us anymore. We'll go somewhere and say we're married. The grave won't run away. It's always waiting, and it's never too late to get to it."

"You, Kayla, you don't need to die. You'd better go back to Yerma. I don't feel like running anymore."

"I can't live without you anymore."

He wanted to answer her, but he lost the strength to speak. He didn't answer, and Kayla didn't ask any more. After a moment he heard the sound of her breathing, and realized that she had fallen asleep. Is this how people commit suicide? - he asked himself. Even as a child he had heard of people who had committed suicide. It had even happened on Krochmalna Street. Once it was a gambler who poisoned himself because his bride had returned his terms. Another time a girl threw herself from the fourth floor because her lover had gone to America without saying goodbye. Sometimes it happened that prostitutes lost their minds. Every day reports of suicides appeared in the newspapers. Bunem had also read about couples who had committed suicide together, and he always believed that such cases had been planned in advance for several weeks.

He and Kayla hadn't decided what they were going to do, but right now they weren't going to commit suicide. She wanted him to run away with her somewhere. But where would he run away with her? And how could he live with her if it turned out that the baby was Yarma's? What if there really was a God, and he punished those who took their own lives? What did the little man know about God, about his plans and his ways of leading? Bunem fell asleep, and woke up when the day began to dawn. He didn't feel the need to live or die. He seemed to have lost love for himself, the little selfish impulse that a person needs to fight for his existence. Indifference seized him. He had never felt such indifference. It was as if he suddenly saw before his eyes the nothingness of the vanity involved in the hassle of life, the futility of the struggle for existence of the body, which would reach the grave anyway. Kayla lay next to him, but he felt no desire for her. Was this the nirvana that the Indian sages talk about? And maybe this is the first touch of death? Kayla woke up.

"Bone!"

"yes."

"Aren't you sleeping?"

"Yes. No."

"Boom, what will you do?"

"You know what."

"Boom, I want to live."

Kayla spoke firmly. Bunem suppressed a smile.

"If you want to live, live."

"With you, Bunem! Only with you!"

"I have nothing to do here."

"You have a lot to do. You're young, and not sick, God forbid. Why do you have to cause so much trouble for everyone - me, your father and mother, your sister Tsirla and the little brothers? Your mother won't stand it. She'll die, God forbid."

Bunem listened and was lost in thought. Kayla's words sounded hollow to his ears, as if she were speaking a foreign language. He had to strain to catch what she was saying.

"Kayla, we have to say goodbye."

"Why, Bonam, why? I'm sure it's your baby."

Once again, Bunem had to make an effort to grasp the meaning of the words she had spoken. The concepts of mine and yours lost their taste in his eyes, and at the same time everything in his soul merged with something else that he had not known before. All worries, all fears and apprehensions faded away and were no more. This is probably how a baby feels in its mother's womb, he thought. Death? What is death? - he wondered, and immediately answered: a fiction devoid of reality, a lie. Kayla interrupted his reflections. "Come with me, Bunem. Think that you are blind, and I am the one who leads you. I will take care of all your needs. You will read your books, and that is it. I will live a pure and kosher life with you. No man will touch me, not even with a little finger. I will live only for your sake." He wanted to answer her and say that he could no longer act like this. But he was too lazy, too weak and indifferent to be able to speak and justify his words. So he muttered:

"Yes, yes."

"Buneml, I have to go and talk to Yarma. Once and for all. I'll tell him I'm leaving him. Maybe I'll be able to convince him to give me a divorce. If not, it doesn't matter. Whatever happens. You're not that religious. You can continue to do what you've allowed yourself to do until now."

"Yes, yes."

"You look tired. Stay in bed. I'll be back later. I'm starting a new life now. I'll live only for you. Only for you."

"yes."

"You will be happy with me."

Bunem smiled. He wanted to ask, "How?" but remained silent. Kayla got out of bed and began to bathe, dress, comb her hair. She offered Bunem half a matzah, but he refused to eat.

"I'm not hungry."

"I'll make you some kneidlah, or Passover pancakes, later. Wait for me. Don't go anywhere!"

A note of warning accompanied her words. She was very energetic, and dressed quickly. Her green eyes cast sharp glances at him, glances of love and fear. Before she left, she kissed him long and said: "Until now I thought it was impossible to love more than I love you. But this night something new arose within me. I will turn worlds for you. I want only one thing: that you do not leave me. Without you I do not want to live. Remember my words!" She went out, and the door slammed behind her. Bunem got up, dressed slowly, went out into the street and stopped someone:

"How do you go to the sea?"

"Where do you want to go, Staten Island, or Coney Island?" 112

Bunem didn't know what to say, but it was easier for him to say Coney Island than Staten Island, because he had heard of Coney Island once. The man went on to explain, saying that one could go there by subway, streetcar, or automobile. Bunem listened, and a moment later he was on his way.

There is an ironic wink here by the author, because the full text of the verse contradicts Sam's anarchist declarations. ("He prays for the well-being of the kingdom, for if it were not for the fear of it, one would swallow up one another alive" Avot, Chapter 3, 2).

Bonam apparently remembered the verses: "Stolen waters are sweet, and hidden bread is pleasant, and he does not know that there are ghosts in the depths of Sheol, called Sheol" (Proverbs 9:17-18) .

The man offers Bunem two opposing options: the beach of Staten Island near New York Harbor. Here Bunem can carry out his suicide plan. In contrast, the beach of Coney Island is an amusement and popular entertainment beach. On this beach, his and Kayla's love of life can come true. Incidentally, the struggle between the two proposed options, reflected in what these two beaches offer, is described in the third part of Bashevis - Singer's autobiographical book "From Warsaw to New York " (the book was translated from English by Zvi Arad and published by Am Oved, 1984).

epilogue

Blaha Rubinstein

"Yarme and Kayla" is the third novel in a series of novels that Szczebies-Singer wrote about the underworld in Poland and America. The three novels were written in New York in the 1960s and 1970s, and were serialized in the Yiddish newspaper "Forwerts". The first of them, "Shoim", was written and published in 1967 (Shoim is the dirty foam that rises from the bottom of a soup pot, and must be removed so that the chicken soup is clean and clear). The second novel, "Di Gess" ("The Guests"), was written and published in 1972. "Yarme on Kayla" ("Yarme and Kayla") was written a few years later, and was serialized on the same stage between December 9, 1976 and October 7, 1977. Since then, no one has touched it. The novel has not appeared in book form, neither in Yiddish nor in translation into any language. This translation, presented to you, returns "Yarma and Kayla" to the reading public in the format of a book in Hebrew.

Bashevis-Singer adopted the Kabbalistic idea, which presents the descent into the abyss of darkness as a means of discovering light. He was also drawn to the strange and the strange, and represented it in his work as a prism for illuminating the complexity of the human soul. This approach was at the heart of the debate he conducted in the years after World War II with Yiddish writers in America, who sought to describe the destroyed Jewish world in a tone of nostalgic idealization. Bashevis-Singer disputed this position, arguing that a writer should describe reality as it is - with its lights and shadows. Indeed, in the novel "The Magician of Lublin" (1959), he inserted characters from the Jewish criminal world, presenting them as people with weaknesses and passions, but also with a lot of grace and emotion. It wasn't long before he turned the spotlight on the Jewish underworld, the one that others sought to deny existed. The series of novels presented above ("Shoim", "The Guests", "Yarme on Keile") occupied the author for ten years. In fact, he presented three versions that grew from a common core. What motivated him to return and illuminate this story from different angles? Hanna Shamrock, one of the greatest scholars of Yiddish literature, relates that Beshabis-Singer told him that he wrote "The Guests" because he was not satisfied with the first version ("Shoim"). 113 This version also did not satisfy him, and he wrote the third - the one before you. 114

The chapters of "Yarma on Kayla" appeared in regular succession towards the end of the week, as a spicy condiment for the Shabbat pleasure of the newspaper's readers. Each part ended with the promise "To be continued" (to be continued), and this promise was kept in an orderly manner. But part of it was not fulfilled: at the bottom of the last page (October 7, 1977) there is a promise of an epilogue ("Epilogue Comet"). I leafed through and leafed through, and I couldn't find one. There is no epilogue to wrap up the plot's loose ends. The newspaper's readers may have been disappointed. They may have wanted to know what happened next: Did the pessimism inherent in Bunem's character prevail, and did he actually

commit suicide? Or perhaps Kayla's energetic vitality tipped the scales, and she managed to restore her lover's will to live? And whose is the baby in Kayla's womb? And what happened to Yarma and Max? And how did the anarchist Saltsha fare in the land of unlimited possibilities?

One can ask and ask, and one can offer various answers. In general, one can also wonder which trend determined the direction of the novel's conclusion - that of sober naturalistic pessimism, or that of romantic heartbreak? Fortunately, the author did not write an epilogue, and the open ending of the novel leaves a huge range of possibilities for the creative imagination of its readers.

Winter 2011

"Scum" was translated into English in 1991 (" Scum "), and shortly thereafter was translated from English into Hebrew ("Chala"). The writer Israel Zamir, Bashevis - Singer's son, told me that his father wanted to shelve this book, but his widow saw to it that it was published in English translation.